

THESIS  
EQUESTRIANISM: SERIOUS LEISURE AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUESTRIANISM: SERIOUS LEISURE AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Using the concepts of serious leisure and symbolic interactionism, this thesis explores the experiences of equestrians in the hunter/jumper discipline. This thesis draws from ethnographic research methods that utilize a combination of two years of participant observation and in-depth interviews. This research challenges the basis for Mead's (and others') exclusion of nonhuman animals from consideration as "authentic" social actors by highlighting the ways horse owners, in this study, describe their horses as minded, thoughtful individuals. These owners refute the notions that horses are mindless objects or are indistinct from other insensate elements of "nature," (i.e. air, water, or land).

Focusing on the interactions between humans and horses, I examine the criteria used by horse owners to define their horses as minded individuals with whom they construct and maintain meaningful and satisfying social relationships. Using the rich and detailed descriptions of participants, I argue that two features of hunter/jumper equestrianism warrant reclassifying it as an amateur pursuit, rather than hobbyist activity: the visible and influential presence of professionals within the sport and owners' perception of horses' subjectivity, which makes the achievement of intersubjectivity possible. I emphasized the role of actions and argue that the concepts of 'mind,' 'self,' and 'personhood' are social constructions that arise from interaction.

Furthermore, using the Serious Leisure Perspective as a theoretical foundation I explore key features of hunter/jumper equestrianism beyond merely human-animal ‘attachments’ or ‘bonds.’ This thesis considers hunter/jumper equestrianism in terms of serious leisure’s six definitional social-psychological elements and confirms the viability of classifying hunter/jumper equestrianism as a form of serious leisure pursuit.

Additionally, I present a new model for classifying the negative consequences, or costs, of serious leisure pursuits. Examining hunter/jumper equestrianism as a form of serious leisure highlights the ‘serious’ costs of participation in a pursuit, which is marginal to both human-animal interaction and leisure activities. Finally, this thesis highlights the potential of studying humans’ relationships with horses for advancing an understanding of how personhood, mind, and identity are socially constructed, and the possibility of studying serious leisure pursuits as alternative sites for community, belonging, and identity in an increasingly fragmented post-modern society.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

As of 2006, 67.1 million pet<sup>1</sup>-owning households in the U.S. owned 172.2 million dogs, cats, birds, and horses (AVMA 2007). Horse owners<sup>2</sup> constitute 1.8 percent of the 2006 U.S. population, with 2.1 million people owning 7.3 million horses (AVMA 2007). In addition, horse owners are predominantly from the middle- and upper-middle classes, with relatively high amounts of leisure time and discretionary income (Keaveney 2008). The percentage and number of households in the U.S. that own horses has increased over the past decade. Nationally, 1.8 percent of households owned horses, up 5.9 percent in the past five years (AVMA 2007). Women comprise the majority (72%) of horse owners and the overwhelming majority (90%) of competitors in local and state horse shows (Folks 2006). While the number of horses in the U.S. has been rising, few studies have examined the role of horse ownership in contemporary social life (Brandt 2004; Whipper 2000).

A concurrent trend is that for many Americans, leisure interests have come to supersede work interests as a means of finding personal fulfillment, identity enhancement, and self-expression (Robinson and Godbey 1997; Stebbins 2007). Traditionally, non-work time has been viewed as a carefree refuge from the more serious pursuit of making money and earning a living (Robinson and Godbey 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms “pet,” “companion animal,” and “partner” interchangeably throughout this thesis despite the power and valuation differences implied by each.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the significant power differences symbolized by the terms “owner,” “partner,” and “associate” I use these designations interchangeably throughout this thesis.

A consequence of the decreasing value placed on the institution of work has been a corresponding increase in the time and value placed on other institutions, particularly leisure.

Challenging the hedonistic, carefree conception of leisure time as merely extra or non-work time is the Serious Leisure Perspective, which was developed by Robert Stebbins (1992) to describe leisure activities that are substantial and serious pursuits, and which provide participants with meaning and deep fulfillment. Stebbins (1997) defines serious leisure pursuits as “sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there, acquiring, and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (p.17). The Serious Leisure Perspective provides a framework for analyzing leisure more substantively than merely extra or free time.

Categorically, the Serious Leisure Perspective synthesizes three main forms of leisure: including serious, casual, and project-based leisure (Stebbins 2007). Serious leisure is characterized by an approach that is earnest, sincere, important, careful, or serious, and the acquisition and expression of its unique skills, knowledge, and experience generates a (leisure) career for its pursuant. In this sense, a career is the sense of temporal continuity a participant gains from the more or less steady development of the skills, experience, and knowledge of his or her serious leisure pursuit. Serious leisure is often contrasted with casual leisure, which is immediate, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived, and pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it (Stebbins 1992). For example, serious leisure includes activities like baseball, astronomy, or stand-up comedy, while casual leisure includes activities like watching TV or going for a walk. Project-based leisure is short-term, moderately complicated, either



one-time or occasional, through infrequent, creative undertaking carried out in free time. Though not serious leisure, project-based leisure requires considerable planning, effort and sometimes skill or knowledge; however, it is distinguished from the latter's failure to generate a career for participants. Essentially, the Serious Leisure Perspective is a classification of approaches (serious, casual, or project-based) to a core activity, rather than a taxonomy of activities. For example, riding a horse can be a one-time activity—casual leisure—or it can become a serious leisure career by those who own multiple horses, regularly compete in amateur shows, and dedicate their non-work time to horse related activities.

The Serious Leisure Perspective has been applied to a variety of activities and contexts; however, it has not been used to explore human-horse activities, animal<sup>3</sup> subjectivity, or 'serious' negative consequences of participation in amateur pursuits. Exploring serious leisure in the context of human-horse activities provides the opportunity to expand the current sociological conception of the mind and the self beyond the ostensibly rigid boundary of the utilization of spoken words. Reformulating the interactionist perspective in a way that acknowledges language and communication beyond merely spoken words allows for understanding the interactional construction of a "personlike" identity in 'words without words.'

This research examines the central role animals and leisure occupy in human culture. Drawing on symbolic interactionist theories, I argue that animals are minded,

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<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, I use the designation "human" and "animal," rather than the more accurate, but cumbersome "human" and "nonhuman animal," which reflects the scientific accuracy that humans are but a type of animal and not categorically distinct.

social beings who<sup>4</sup> are capable of interacting symbolically and constructing relationships with their human partners. This project expands Mead's (1962) concepts of the mind and the self beyond exclusively human attributes and reconceives of the mind and the self as the products of social interaction. Human-animal interaction and serious leisure are not separate phenomena. They operate in equestrianism in a mutually reinforcing manner. The social world of equestrianism provides an ideal format to explore the interactional construction of meaning between humans and horses. In addition, this context allows for the examination of the manner socially constructed meaning contributes to the unique ethos of a serious leisure pursuit.

Equestrianism has been classified as a type of "nature challenge activity," which derives its central challenge from "beating nature" (Stebbins 2007:9). Opposing this traditional view is the notion that horses are subjective actors, possessing minds, intellectual lives, unique personalities, and readily identifiable tastes (Sanders 1993). Rather than an insensate element of nature, comparable to air, water, or land, I contend that horses' "personhood" is constructed through social interaction with their human partners, and which is premised on intersubjectivity.

Human-horse activities offer a context in which to explore the definitional social-psychological elements of serious leisure. Exploring equestrianism as a leisure pursuit, in which those engaging in it take a serious, rather than a casual or project-based approach,

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<sup>4</sup> I use subject pronouns throughout this thesis when referring to horses and other animals, rather than object pronouns intentionally to reinforce the view of this thesis that horses are minded, subjective, individual "people," not objects. Of relevant note is that when attempting to publish a paper based on her early work with chimpanzees, the primatologist Jane Goodall encountered criticism from reviews because she insisted on naming the animals she observed and referred to *them* as "he" and "she" rather than "it" (Beckoff 1998:16).

provides the opportunity to explore unique dimensions of serious leisure. Specifically, horses are physiologically and psychologically distinct from other pets such as dogs and cats. Horses are physically larger, require more space, and think and socialize differently. Owing to their increased requirements, horses are more costly – in financial, time, physical, emotional, and social terms than dogs or cats are to own. Horses' instrumental capacity to be ridden, combined with the value owners' place on their relationships with horses offers a unique context to consider the affect of relational factors on Stebbins' (2007) six definitional elements of serious leisure. Additionally equestrianism offers the opportunity to explore the six dimensions of serious leisure in a pursuit that the partners in the core activity communicate primarily in the absence of spoken language.

Lastly, this thesis substantively explores the type, degree, and affect of the costs of serious leisure in a manner not previously addressed. Current research presents an oversimplified categorization of the negative consequences of serious leisure, reducing the costs to dislikes, disappointments, and tensions (Stebbins 2007). Serious leisure pursuits are characterized by the meaningful, important, or 'serious' approach its participants adopt in their commitments, involvements, and participation style. Not surprisingly, the same seriousness, importance, and meaning are found in the costs paid by participants. Exploring the costs, which constrain, restrict and dilute serious leisure pursuits, as well as the factors that facilitate, benefit, and encourage participation, provides the opportunity for broadening our understanding of leisure satisfaction, and how time, financial, physical, social and emotional costs diminish the capacity of leisure to be a source of identity, belonging and social interaction.

Initially, my interest in horse owners and the hunter/jumper discipline, stemmed from my personal experience as a horse owner. I have had the privilege of meeting and knowing many exceptional equestrians (some of whose voices are included in this project) and witnessing some truly timeless partnerships between women and horses. I was interested in exploring the positive and negative characteristics of owning horses and their experiences in the hunter/jumper discipline. As a horse owner, I was intrigued by the unique horse world subculture and the extent of sacrifices horse owners make to continue their involvement. The Serious Leisure Perspective provided a conceptual framework with which to explore the structural elements, social-psychological characteristics, and costs of equestrianism in a serious and meaningful manner.

Data for this project were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen female equestrians in Northern Colorado, as well as participant observation that took place over a two-year period. Participants included twelve amateur riders and three professional trainers, all of whom owned horses. The grounded theory techniques developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), including open, axial and selective coding, were utilized in analyzing interviews and observations for general themes. These themes were then tied to the existing research on leisure and human-animal studies. Three main themes emerged from the connections: structural elements, social-psychological characteristics, and costs of hunter/jumper equestrianism. These themes are important topics in leisure research, and by exploring them within the context of hunter/jumper equestrianism this project explores a new framework for understanding some types of human-animal interactions. More information on the participants and data collection process is provided in the methods chapter.

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, including this introduction. In subsequent chapters, I will present a review of literature, methods, results, and conclusion. The literature review explores the relevant research in both leisure and human-animal studies and provides a general conceptual framework that guides my results and conclusions. The methods chapter describes the general characteristics of equestrians at the regional and national level, general characteristics of the participants in this study, and a rationale for using an all female sample. The methods chapter also describes the data gathering, coding, and analysis process. The results are divided into three chapters, the first of which discusses the structural characteristics of serious leisure; the second explores the social-psychological characteristics defining serious leisure pursuits; and the third examines the costs of hunter/jumper equestrianism, in which I propose a new model for exploring serious leisure costs. Finally, the conclusion summarizes these results, addresses the contributions of this project, and discusses some of the research limitations.

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

Until fairly recently, sociologists have devoted little attention to the investigation of human-animal studies. In his 1979 Presidential Address to the Southern Sociological Society, Clifton Bryant criticized sociologists for ignoring the relationships between humans and animals, stating:

Sociologists have often been myopic in their observations of human behavior, cultural patterns, and social relationships, and unfortunately have not taken into account the permeating social influence of animals in our larger cultural fabric, and our more idiosyncratic individual modes of interaction and relationships, in their analyses of social life. With very few exceptions, the sociological literature is silent on this topic (Bryant 1979:400).

Following Bryant's call for research with a 'zoological focus,' a limited number of studies have been produced.

### **NATURE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Sociologists, generally, have been reluctant to explore social interaction beyond the boundaries of human-human interaction (Arluke and Sanders 1993). The human-only tradition is based largely on a linguistic Cartesian assumption that spoken language constitutes a qualitatively different capacity in humans and animals for minded interaction. Building on this model, George Herbert Mead claimed that animals' presumed "inability to symbolize means that he or she is lacking in all the supposedly unique human attributes premised on linguistic facility" (Arluke and Sanders 1993:379). From this anthropocentric perspective, animals' thoughts and behaviors are solely

instinctual manifestations, and to whom they lack both meaning and intention. Animals, according to Mead, lack a conscious self and are capable only of “reacting rather than acting, apprehending rather than comprehending and existing only in their immediate situation” (Sanders 2003:406). Lacking the necessary capacities of mindedness, self-conscious awareness, and symbolization, animals are seen as incapable of engaging in any social interaction predicated on shared meaning. Following these assumptions, human interaction with animals has been defined as “fictive,” the result of anthropomorphic “folk delusions,” or merely projections of humanlike qualities (Sanders 2003:420).

Many researchers have countered Mead’s ideas on selfhood and the mind by reformulating the role of spoken language. Keri Brandt (2005) argues that de-privileging spoken language as the exclusive form of meaningful communication would create a model of the self that allows animals’ subjective presence to become visible through interaction. In her research on human-cat relationships, Leslie Irvine (2004), argues, “in order for interaction to become a relationship, which is the key to selfhood, both parties must sense the subjective presence of the other” (p.183). Franklin et al (2007), in a theoretical analysis of the benefits of companion animals, argue, “although animals are unable to express themselves through language, they can be understood as having selves, exhibiting agency, and expressing emotions” (p.49). Central to this reformulation is the recognition that spoken words are not the only type of language or the only way to communicate. Humans communicate with animals and other humans using actions, the meanings of which are constructed socially through interaction. Thus, the meaning of action, such as a ‘thumbs up’ gesture, comes to be defined differently depending on the

social context. Additionally, this reformulation acknowledges that the boundary separating humans/animals is not fixed or static; rather, it is constructed through interaction.

Some researchers have rejected Mead's (1962) idea that animals are incapable of interacting symbolically (Alger and Alger 1997; Sanders 1999), and they present evidence of animals' cognitive abilities, arguing, "animals are indeed capable of creating shared definitions of the situation with their human companions" (Flynn 2000:124).

Arluke and Sanders (1996) argue the important issue is not the presence of mindedness or possession of language skills by animals, but rather attribution of mindedness and intent to animals on the part of their human companions (Kruse 2002). Sanders (2003) similarly suggests:

It may be that the 'reality' of those who foster close relationships with companion animals, see them as thoughtful and reciprocating, construct their unique identities, and regard them as full-fledged partners in collective action is an anthropomorphic 'delusion.' But to remain true to the interactionist view of human beings as actively involved in evaluating situations, defining others, having goals, devising reasonable plans of action, and coordinating their interactions with others, I submit that we must see those who foster close relationships with animals as more than the delusional victims of 'folk psychology.' As active and practical creators of meaning, caretakers base understandings of their animal companions and construct effective relationships with them on routine experience with their 'behavior in context.' (P. 420)

The understandings and emotional connections between humans and their animals are created and maintained in the absence of spoken language. It is through action or 'behavior in context' (Sanders 2003:420) that humans construct meaning from their interactions with animals and come to understand animals' subjective experience 'through interaction' (Irvine 2004). The key to sensing subjectivity is that interaction must seem to have a source, an Other, who has a mind, beliefs, and desires (Irvine 2004).



Subjectivity is an important concept in symbolic interaction because its existence in others allows for the possibility of achieving intersubjectivity, which provides the foundation for meaningful interaction (Brandt 2005).

In exploring animal subjectivity, Irvine (2004) developed a model of four self-experiences that underlie and make us aware of subjectivity, generating the “core-self” (p. 15). The four self-experiences through which humans can “know the selves of animals” are agency, coherence, affectivity, and self-history (Irvine 2004:9). Agency is the actor’s recognition that he or she has control over his/her actions, or the capacity for self-willed action (Irvine 2004; Sanders 2007). Coherence “focuses attention on the actor’s physical self...the entity to which...agency belongs” and is demonstrated by the ability to distinguish, recognize, and orient behavior towards specific Others (Sanders 2007:325). Affectivity is the capacity for emotions, and is constituted by two types: categorical affects, which are discrete categories of feelings, such as happiness or sadness; and vitality affects, which are ways of feeling, such as mood or temperament (Irvine 2004). Self-history, or continuity, is made possible by memory, in which events, objects, Others, and emotions are preserved and gain meaning (Irvine 2004). This model of self proposed by Irvine (2004) offers an analytical approach for understanding animal selfhood as emergent through interaction.

Theoretically, achieving intersubjectivity requires more than one subject who is capable of interacting symbolically to “estimate with some degree of certainty, the feelings, thoughts, and intentions of Others;” essentially, it necessitates the designation of ‘subject,’ or ‘person,’ rather than ‘object’ (Sanders 1999:141). The designation of “person” is an essentially social activity, and provides the essential foundation for the

most elemental social identity (Sanders 1993). As a basic categorical identity, “personhood” is constructed within the interactions that comprise relationships. Historically, the exclusion of certain groups from this category is a pervasive phenomenon. Groups perceived as lacking the “requisite level of mind...have been, and continue to be, denied the status of [person]:” notably so-called ‘primitives’ or ‘savages;’ African Americans and Native Americans in the United States; and ‘sub-humans’ in Nazi Germany during the 1930’s and 1940’s (Sanders 1993:210).

As a socially constructed category, “personhood” is an interactional achievement, defined to the inclusion and exclusion of particular groups based on abstract meanings attached to a group: e.g., skin color, religion, or sexual behavior. Similarly, the current criteria defining personhood is the ability to use spoken language. This criterion presumes that the ability to use verbal language indicates a ‘self,’ capable of minded action, meaning construction, and authentic interaction. This linguicentric distinction, like other ostensibly rigid and arbitrary boundaries dividing minded persons from mindless others, has received criticism within the past two decades from a small but growing number of researchers in the field of post-Meadian symbolic interaction who assert that animals are not only capable of achieving intersubjectivity, but also the concept of ‘person’ is socially constructed (Franklin et al. 2007).

Building from research on alingual and disabled humans provides a basis for reformulating the linguicentric distinction, which excludes those without the ability to use spoken language from the category of minded persons. Such studies (Bogden and Taylor 1989; Goode 1994; Pollner and McDonald-Wickler 1985), exploring intersubjectivity in “worlds without words,” have documented adult communication with alingual or humans

with disabilities and found myriad ways that parents and adult caretakers “construct complex and rewarding worlds of mutual intelligibility with children unable to communicate through conventional verbal means and who have typically been seen by professional outsiders as lacking any communicative competence” (Franklin et al. 2007:53). Both Gubrium (1986), who studied Alzheimer’s patients, and Bogden and Taylor (1989), who studied caretakers of persons with severe disabilities, found that “the nondisabled describe a process whereby caretakers defined the disabled as full-fledged human beings;” and despite a lack of spoken language, constructed a social identity, through interaction, recognizing those partners as persons (Alger and Alger 1997:71).

The definitional process of constructing “personhood” entails four dimensions, outlined by Bogden and Taylor (1989). First, is the attribution of mindedness to the Other: that is, the Other is seen as minded, able to reason, understand, and remember. The nondisabled “regard the disabled individuals as partners in the intersubjective play of social interaction, interpret their gestures, sounds, postures, and expressions as indicators of intelligence and are adept at taking the role of the disabled others” (Sanders 1993:210). Second, the nondisabled person is seen as an individual by the nondisabled. The former are seen as having a unique personality, comprised of identifiable likes and dislikes, authentic feelings and motives, and a distinct life history (Alger and Alger 1997; Sanders 1993). Third, the disabled person is seen as reciprocating, giving as much to the relationship as they receive from it. The nondisabled person may derive companionship, the opportunity to meet others in the community, and a sense of accomplishment in contributing to the disabled others’ well-being and personal growth (Bogden and Taylor 1989). Finally, disabled persons are humanized by being incorporated into a social space.

Disabled persons are regarded as a “full and important member,” and by involving them in the ongoing “rituals and routines of the social unit,” the nondisabled actively situate the disabled into the “intimate relational network” (Bogdan and Taylor 1989; Sanders 1993:210-211).

Crucially, the relationships —and the interactions they are based on —are emergent: built through prolonged and close contact between parties (Franklin et al. 2007). Achievement of intersubjectivity in the absence of spoken words requires “paying close and detailed attention to habitual routines, the spatialization of domestic life and tactile and embodied actions” (Franklin et al. 2007:53). For Gubrium (1986), the construction of ‘personhood’ in Alzheimer’s patients requires “the treatment of the mind as a social preserve, as an internal entity assigned and sustained both by, and for, whomever assumes it to exist, can account for what is taken to be the minded conduct of the mindless” (p.38). Similarly, Bogdan and Taylor (1989) argue, that “the definition of a person is to be found in the relationship between the definer and the defined, not determined by personal characteristics, or the abstract meanings attached to the group of which the person is apart” (p.136). Fundamentally, the concepts of ‘person,’ self, and mind are interactional constructions, rather than fixed entities.

Drawing on the findings of studies with alingual and persons with disabilities, researchers (Bogdan and Taylor 1989; Gubrium 1986; Pollner and McDonald-Wickler 1985) have challenged the exclusion of alingual humans from Mead’s (1962) conception of “persons” by extending the process by which caretakers come to understand alingual humans’ subjective experience to the process by which pet owners construct a “personlike” identity for their pets and come to understand their subjectivity (Alger and

Alger 1997:71; Sanders 1993). These researchers emphasize the distinction between “humans” and beings excluded from Mead’s definition of “persons” (Alger and Alger 1997; Sanders 1993). Sanders (1993) points out, however, that “seeing these...encounters as involving communication of a definition of the situation, mutual taking the role of the other, and projection of a future event does not...require that we literally see [animals] as [humans]” (p.212). It does suggest that far from being an exclusive attribute of speaking humans, the ability to interact symbolically is widely distributed throughout the animal kingdom. As with other socially constructed concepts such as race, religion, or gender, spoken language utilization is not a qualitative attribute indicating binary distinctions in mindedness or selfhood.

## **HUMAN ANIMAL STUDIES**

Studies of animal mindedness highlight the importance of interactions and relationships in achieving intersubjectivity. Researchers have found that, as individuals with distinct personalities, the behaviors and characteristics associated with the relationships between humans and different animal species are unique as well. In a study on the characteristics of new owners of dogs and cats, Serpell (1991) found behavioral differences between dog and cat owners. He found new dog owners walked more and had improved health scores, compared to cat owners who had fewer health complaints but had no observable change in walking frequency. He found the new dog owners sustained the benefits over ten months, while the benefits to cat owners were not sustained (Serpell 1991).

### *Human Animal Relationships*

More recently, the American Veterinary Medical Association (2007) conducted a study on U.S. pet ownership and demographics, examining the pet population, veterinary medical use and expenditures, and pet owner demographics. Their results indicated significant differences between the attitudes and behaviors of owners of different species of pets. One prominent area of difference was in the number of trips to (and expenditures on) the veterinarian. Among dog-owning households, 82.7% had at least one visit to the vet in the previous year, compared to only 63.7% of cat-owning households and 61.1% of horse-owning households. Despite less frequent visits, horse-owning households had the highest mean veterinary expenditure per household (\$360; compared to \$356 for dogs and \$190 for cats) and the highest mean expenditure per visit (\$167; compared to \$135 for dogs and \$112 for cats) (AVMA 2007).

One methodological issue in many human-animal studies is they lack measurement of humans' attachment to pets. Several studies have found attachment to a pet to be more important in conferring health benefits than pet ownership. Garrity et al. (1989) found higher levels of pet attachment to be associated with greater happiness and decreased depression. Ory and Goldberg (1983) found no relationship between pet ownership and happiness, but when attachment to the pet was analyzed, those who considered themselves more attached were also happier. Yorke (2008) explained, "researchers have demonstrated that simply owning a pet does not equate to attachment and necessarily lead to happiness. Human-animal studies have not consistently assessed pet attachment and this has contributed to some of the inconsistent findings related to health, well-being and pet ownership" (p.12).

In addressing this methodological issue, the AVMA (2007) study examined the affect of attachment to pets on the frequency and expenditure on veterinary visits. The researchers found that the bond owners had with their pets affected the frequency of veterinary visits. Dog- and cat-owning households that considered their pets to be family members (dogs: 3%; cats: 2%) took their pets to the veterinarian more often than those who considered them to be pets/companions (dogs: 2.2%; cats: 1.4%) or property (dogs: 1%; cats: 0.7%). However, households that considered their horses to be property took their horses to the veterinarian more often (4.1%) than those that considered their horses to be family members (2.1%) or pets/companions (2.1%). The researchers speculated that this is likely because households viewing their horse as property use their horses for work-related purposes. However, despite this difference, of the dog-, cat-, and horse-owning households that considered their pets to be family members, more horse-owners had veterinary expenditures over \$500 (27.2%) than did dog- (25%) or cat-owners (12.9%). These findings indicate that far from a universal phenomenon, pet ownership is affected by the species of pet and the relationship (or attachment) between the human and animal.

What emerges from the literature is an understanding that the benefits of pet ownership are based in part on the unique emotional connection shared between humans and their animals. Research also points to significant differences that exist in the behaviors and characteristics of owners of different pet species. Far from representing a singular group, the behaviors and characteristics of pet owners may be the product of their specific interactions with their pets. However, existing research does not explore pets or animal activities beyond their essentially therapeutic role. What is missing from

the literature is any theoretical underpinning for explaining the meaning, identification and culture associated with pet ownership; specifically, horse ownership.

### *Human-Horse Relationships*

As a species, horses are unique from other animals owned by humans as pets in three ways. First, humans have historically owned horses for instrumental purposes: farming, transportation, and an important implement of war (Brandt 2005; Keaveney 2008). James Lynch argued:

For many thousands of years, the history of two species, humans and horses, has been intimately linked. No other animal, with the exception of the dog, has had such an intimate association with humans. Without horses, human civilization would have evolved very differently, since horses have played an integral part in the spread of human cultures throughout the world (in Beckoff 2007:1144).

Although dogs and cats have occasionally been used for utilitarian purposes, most notably hunting, horses have had a larger role in economic, military, or occupational realms. Historically, dogs and cats have predominately occupied the private realms, such as family and the home, while horses have predominately occupied public realms, such as work and transportation (Beck and Katcher 1996).

A second key difference between horses and other pets is in the way they think, and as a result, the way they socialize. Humans, dogs, and cats are predator animals by nature; while in contrast, horses are prey species: an herbivorous grazing animal (Grandin 2009). Herbivorous grazing animals, such as horses, are vegetarians who get their food through grazing or slowly consuming and digesting food throughout the day, as opposed to dogs and cats, who typically consume one or two large meals. As a type of prey animal, horses are flight animals, as opposed to cattle or sheep, who are also prey animals



but who use bunching together for safety, rather than flight (Grandin 2009). This important distinction affects the way horses think. Flight animals are more skittish and startle more easily than do bunching animals. They are also on constant alert, hyper-vigilant, ready to flee at all times, and are mistrustful of novel stimuli (Grandin 2009; Vidrine et al. 2002).

Grandin (2009) compares horses to autistic people in their hyper-specific sensitivity to sensory-based detail. She claims that horses are more sensory-based than language-based and “think in pictures, sounds, touch sensations, smells, and tastes” (2009:123). Because of their sensitivity to novel, rapid movement, which enables their survival in the wild, horses are meticulously attuned to the nuances of their surroundings, which include humans. The language horses use to communicate with each other is primarily non-verbal and through the use of body positioning, expressions, gaze following, body movements, smell, and touch (Brandt 2005). By relying predominately on nonverbal actions, horses are able to detect danger and understand a herd ranking system without spoken words.

A result of the unique way horses’ think is the way they socialize. Horses socialize much differently than do dogs or cats, who spend most of their time with humans, or at least in human homes (Keaveney 2008). The nearly constant exposure and immersion of dogs and cats into a human environment habituates them to a wider range of human objects and practices. Horses, by distinction, often require years of intentional training to habituate them to a relatively limited range of human objects and practices. However, horses socialize differently—not solely based on their physical separation from humans, in a barn or pasture, instead of a living room—but also based on their herd

mentality. Horses are herd animals; their primary attachment is to other horses, and isolation causes them stress and anxiety. Horses never fully assimilate humans into their herd; they “essentially have an insider versus outsider relationship” (Keaveney 2008:445). In contrast, dogs are pack animals, but they adopt humans into their pack, interacting with humans using essentially the same behavior patterns they would with other dog members of their pack (Grandin 2009). For horses, survival as prey animals depends on their herd; specifically, survival depends on avoiding conflict through the stable relationships, roles, and behaviors dictated by the herd’s hierarchy.

In addition to historical reasons for ownership and differences in the way horses think and socialize, horses are substantively different from other pets in a third way: their physical size. An average horse weights approximately 1200 pounds and stands over five feet tall at the withers, compared to the average dog who weighs about 50 pounds and stands approximately 20 inches at the withers. Owing to their large size, horses are unique among companion animals in their capacity to be ridden. This unique capacity, combined with horses’ hyper-specific sensitivity to sensory detail, creates interactions between humans and horses that necessitate a high level of body contact and nonverbal interaction. Horses’ language operates “through the body such that horses must use their bodies to communicate their subjective presence” (Brandt 2004:301). When communicating with other humans, people generally rely on spoken language to transmit ideas, feelings, and goals. When humans and horses interact, they must create a new language through which both can “communicate their subjective presence” (Brandt 2004:301). The new language uses the medium of the body and of action as the foundation.

The large size of horses not only distinguishes them from other pets, but also adds an element of danger not experienced with other pets. In a review of dangerous sports, Ueek et al. (2004) concluded that horseback riding to be one of the most dangerous sports. Similarly, Chitnavis et al. (1996) found that more accidents occur per hour from horseback riding than from motorcycling. Hausberg et al. (2008) summarized, “the relationship that exists between a horse and rider is an important factor when determining the risk of injury while riding“ (p.10). Specifically, Keeling et al. (1999) found that approximately one quarter of all horse-related accidents were due to the horse being frightened and miscommunication between horse and rider. Thus, communication is necessary not only in the creation of a relationship between humans and horses, but also in reducing injury.

## **LEISURE STUDIES**

The concept of free time is a central aspect of leisure studies research. Sociologists, as well as psychologists and philosophical researchers, have defined and interpreted leisure in a variety of ways, often in contrast to the concept of work-time. Leisure is conceptualized as uncoerced activity undertaken during free time, which people want to do, find fulfilling or satisfying, and can use their abilities and resources to succeed (Stebbins 2007). Attempts to define leisure have primarily been based on experiential research, exploring how people perceive their own use of time and activities.

In a review of the literature, Iso-Ahola (1979) identified three factors dominating leisure studies research: work relatedness, freedom, and motivation. Activities that are most clearly leisure have been identified as low in work relation, high in freedom and

intrinsically motivated. Twenty years later, Gelber (1999), in a history of hobbyists in America, found the defining factor of low work relation to be problematic in conceptualizing leisure. He argued that certain leisure activities have been popular and encouraged in America because they are often work-like in their activities, have values that mirror the workplace, and after World War II, many hobbyists attempted to turn leisure activities into paying occupations.

As a defining factor of leisure, freedom refers to the free choice of individuals to engage in an activity by their own uncoerced free will. There has been a shift in the literature away from identifying free choice as a defining feature of leisure in recent research through the recognition that choice is never completely free. Rather, societal and cultural expectations, laws, abilities, education and the availability or lack of monetary funds hedges free choice. Freedom of choice to engage in leisure activities is thus seen as constrained or limited to the options made available by the above factors (Juniu and Henderson 2001).

Motivation for leisure activities is seen as originating intrinsically: out of personal desires or drives, and not from external demands or expectations. Central to this conceptualization is the notion of free time as time away from unpleasant obligations. Leisure may entail obligations, but at their core, these must be pleasant obligations. Fundamentally, leisure remains a highly subjective construct, defined as such by the people engaging in it.

As a subjective construct, leisure has been conceptualized as a forum (Kelly 1990) or life space (Samdahl 1988). These understandings emerge out of past research that defined any free time outside of work as leisure. Leisure as non-work time was

conceived as constituting the core meaning of what it means to be a free human being and an essential part of life (Kelly 1990). The non-constraining nature of leisure, as a time to exert individual preferences has lead some researchers to conceptualize it as an opportunity for self improvement and self-exploration (de Grazia 1962; Schmidt and Little 2005), an arena for expressing one's individuality (Samdahl 1988) and a medium for self-development (Murphy 1974).

Bosserman and Gagan (1972) suggested that leisure in post-industrial society is no longer seen as chiefly a means of recuperating from the struggles of work. As with the research of others (Lefkowitz 1979; Yankelovich 1981), leisure has more recently come to be seen as offering the prime opportunity for personal expression, enhancement of self-identity and self-fulfillment. Seltzer and Wilson (1980) offered empirical support for the view that leisure is used for self-development. They found that both men and women with incomes above the median use more non-work time for self-development than do individuals with incomes below the median (Stebbins 1992).

This more recent understanding of leisure as an experience rather than as extra time or a reward for doing something else affirms Kelly's (1990) depiction of leisure as an essential part of being human. Over time, understandings of leisure have shifted from an objective paradigm of time after work, to one based on subjectivity and experience (Mannell 1980) and a state of mind (Lee 1964). The experiential qualities defining leisure allows it to be applied and studied across a broad range of areas; for example, the leisure experience has been analyzed in tourism (Iso-Ahola and Mannell 1987), consumer behavior (Bloch and Bruce 1984), therapeutic recreation (Dattilo and Kleiber 1993),

recreational programming (Rossman 1989) and outdoor recreation (Brown and Driver 1978).

### *Three Types of Leisure*

Studies indicate that for many Americans, leisure interests have come to supersede work interests as a means of finding personal fulfillment, identity enhancement, and self-expression. The Serious Leisure Perspective is a theoretical typology for categorizing all leisure activities. First theorized by Stebbins to synthesize studies of amateur and hobbyist activities, it has been refined into a theoretical framework classifying all types of leisure pursuits as one of three possible types: serious, casual, and project-based (1992).

As unique forms, serious leisure pursuits have been the subject of more extensive study than either casual or project-based leisure. Casual leisure is defined as “immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity that requires little or no special training to enjoy it” (Stebbins 1997:18). What is essential to the categorizations is the particular mode of engaging in, or approach towards, an activity that they represent. Though casual leisure does not offer the durable benefits of serious leisure, it does offer participants its own benefits and costs. These benefits include the sparking of creativity and discovery, learning through edutainment or infotainment, regeneration or re-creation of self outside of work time, the development, and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, and a sense of well-being and quality of life. Contrasting with these benefits are the costs of casual leisure, which include boredom due to lack of

challenge, absence of a distinctive leisure identity, and limited contribution to self and community (Stebbins 2001).

The second type of leisure approach is a project-based creative undertaking, which is short term; moderately complicated; either one-time, occasional, or infrequent; and carried out in free time (Stebbins 2007). It requires considerable planning, effort and, sometimes, skill or knowledge. The main difference between project-based and serious leisure is the former fails to generate a sense of career. In Stebbins' (2007) framework, a career is the sense of temporal continuity or progress and development of the knowledge, skills, and experience of a specific pursuit. Project-based leisure requires some skill or knowledge, a need to persevere, some degree of personal identity, and a social world, although one that is usually less complicated than the social worlds of serious leisure (Stebbins 2007).

The third type of approach to leisure is serious leisure, which is defined as activities "sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Stebbins 1997:17). Serious leisure is seen as deeply satisfying, profound, long lasting, and based on substantial skill, knowledge, and experience. As such, serious leisure can be described as providing its participants with a full existence. More than merely free time, occasional, or one-shot, serious leisure pursuits are characterized as important, substantial, meaningful, and significant.

## **SERIOUS LEISURE PERSPECTIVE**

Within the category of serious leisure, Stebbins (2007) has identified three types: amateur pursuits, hobbyist activities, and career volunteering. Structurally, these types are distinguished by the presence or absence of professionals, whose enactment of the core activity of the pursuit must be sufficiently visible to those amateurs in a pursuit so as to influence their behaviors and attitudes. Categorically, amateur pursuits are distinguished by the presence of professional counterparts, while hobbyist activities and career volunteering are defined by the absence of professionals.

### *Social Psychological Characteristics*

At the social-psychological level, Stebbins (2007) defined serious leisure by six characteristics. These characteristics are shared by all three forms of serious leisure but are not present in casual and project-based leisure. First is the occasional need to persevere in the activity. Participants have to meet certain challenges occasionally in order to continue experiencing the same level of fulfillment. Stebbins (2007) explained that for some, the deepest fulfillment came at the end of an activity—rather than during it—from successfully conquering adversity and overcoming obstacles. Second is the opportunity to follow a leisure career in the endeavor, one shaped by its own special contingencies, turning points, and stages of achievement and involvement. Third, serious leisure participants make significant personal effort using specially acquired knowledge, training or skill, and at times all three. Careers in serious leisure unfold along lines of participants' effort to achieve. Fourth, serious leisure imbues several durable benefits or tangible, salutary outcomes for participants. These benefits include self-actualization,



self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration (or renewal of self), feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction, sense of belonging, and lasting physical products of the activity (e.g., a painting or piece of furniture). The benefit of self-gratification, or pure fun, also enjoyed by participants in casual leisure is by far the most evanescent benefit on the list. Seeking to realize these benefits constitutes a powerful motivation and benefit for serious leisure participants (Stebbins 1997).

Fifth, serious leisure is defined by a unique ethos that emerges in parallel with each specific form. An ethos is the spirit of community of participants in serious leisure, manifested in shared values, beliefs, goals, practices and values. Stebbins (2007) states, “the social world of the participants is the organizational milieu in which the associated ethos – at bottom a cultural formation – is expressed (as attitudes, beliefs, and values) or realized (as practices, goals)” (p.12) Social worlds, according to David Unruh (1980) are each held together by semi-formal or mediated communication. Unruh argued (1979), many social worlds are neither heavily bureaucratized nor substantively organized through face-to-face interaction. Rather, communication is commonly mediated by newsletters, posted notices, telephone messages, mass mailings, radio and TV announcements, and similar menus.

The sixth defining characteristic of serious leisure pursuits is the tendency of participants to identify strongly with their chosen pursuit. The sincerity, importance, and earnestness of serious leisure become a basis for a distinctive identity for many participants. Research by Shipway and Jones (2008) further suggests that individuals’ leisure identity may motivate them to participate in specific activities and the activity can

become a more salient dimension of their identity as it serves the self-expression of their abilities.

Stebbins (1997) identified serious leisure activities as generating their own lifestyle as well as their own identities, both of which center on a particular form of leisure considered by participants to be a central life interest. Stebbins (1998) defined lifestyle as “a distinctive set of shared patterns of tangible behavior that is organized around a set of coherent interests or social conditions or both, that is explained and justified by a set of related values, attitudes and orientations and that under certain conditions, becomes the basis for a separate, common social identity for its participants” (p.111). That is, participants are members of a category of people who recognize themselves and, to some degree, are recognized by the broader community for the distinctive mode of life they lead (Stebbins 2001). Some casual leisure participants may find lifestyles from their casual leisure activities, although according to Stebbins (1992), these lifestyles will be “less profound” and many forms of casual leisure are “fleeting, mundane, and commonplace for most people to find a distinctive [lifestyle] within it” (p.7).

What the literature highlights is the potential capacity of serious leisure to provide a source of meaning, identification, and culture to its participants. Research is lacking, however, that examines the seriousness with which many pet owners, specifically horse owners approach activities with their pets. With two exceptions (Baldwin and Norris 1999; Gillespie et al. 2002), research has not considered animal activities to be a form of serious leisure pursuit. These two exceptions explored dog sports as serious leisure and considered them as hobbyist activities, rather than amateur pursuits. Currently, no

research has been published that explores any animal activities as amateur pursuits, or that explores horse activities as a form of leisure; serious or otherwise.

### *Serious Leisure Costs*

Serious leisure researchers have tended to focus on classifying activities as one type of serious leisure and on identifying any benefits derived from participation. While exploring the factors that motivate, encourage, and benefit serious leisure participants is useful, the understanding produced from such analysis is limited to the extent it does not also consider the factors that hinder, discourage, and dilute participation and satisfaction in leisure pursuits. In contrast with a leisure approach that is characterized as earnest, important, and meaningful, Stebbins (2001) identified three types of costs in serious leisure pursuits: disappointments, dislikes, and tensions.

The first type of cost, disappointments, is defined as the absence of expected rewards and their manifestations (Stebbins 2001). Disappointments are viewed as pursuit specific and of which a general categorization has yet to be conceived. In the specific area of serious leisure sports, Stebbins (2007) identified three categories of disappointment. First is the disappointment that results from the loss of an important or championship game. Second is the disappointment from being sidelined by injury or illness. Third is the disappointment stemming from a poor performance in a specific game or a poor performance by the team throughout the season. Team, as implied by Stebbins (2007), refers to human teams, and excludes from consideration human-animal teams, such as human-dog search and rescue, military, dogsled, and K9 police teams; and human-horse polo, racing, driving and riding teams. Baldwin and Norris's (1999)

research suggests that in serious leisure dog sports, the human-dog team is a key feature of the pursuit, and without the human-dog team relationship, many participants would experience a diminished sense of satisfaction from the activity.

The second type of cost is dislikes. More than trivial pet peeves or annoyances, dislikes are defined as problems that require the practitioner to adjust significantly, possibly even to leave the pursuit. As with disappointments, Stebbins (2001) viewed dislikes to be area specific, with little generalizable application beyond the finding that professionals tend to have more dislikes than amateurs. In the specific area of sport, four categories of dislike have been identified. First is the dislike in both amateur and professional spheres of 'the politics,' which includes favoritism, unfairness, dishonesty, and inconsistency in the ways the management dealt with players. Second is the dislike, particularly among amateur baseball and football players, of an under-motivated teammate. Third, at the lower end of adult amateur sport, is the dislike of incompetent coaches, which includes weak communication with players, ineffective game strategies and poorly developed knowledge of technique (a phenomenon similar to that observed in theater). Lastly, amateurs expressed the dislike of the slight to non-existent media coverage of their team's activities by local mass media (Stebbins 2001).

The third type of cost, tensions, is the most general of the three categories found in amateur-professional serious leisure pursuits. Stebbins identified five types of tensions experienced by serious leisure participants. First is stage fright, which he viewed as affecting every field involving some form of public performance. Second is interpersonal frictions, or the negative, unpleasant relationships possible throughout the amateur-professional world that occasionally cause practitioners envy, despise, disrespect or in

some way regard with jaundice a college—whether peer, agent, coach, manager or professional (or amateur) (Stebbins 2001). Third tryouts and auditions are a source of tension when those participating experience stage fright, incompetent gatekeepers, patronage as found in old boy networks, or discrimination along the lines of sex, style, and ethnicity. In sport, a fourth category of tension comes from the calls of referees. A fifth category unique to individual sports is that of financial insecurity among junior players. For these players, tournament earnings are an inconsistent source of income, and they must supplement these sources with activities such as teaching or endorsement.

Calculating a cost-reward equation for serious leisure motivation has yet to be created by researchers. In part, as a socially created social world, the unique cost-reward pattern of each leisure world is unique. Although there may be similar types of rewards and costs across a variety of serious leisure fields, it is unlikely that the cost-reward pattern or margin of profit would be the same across differently socially constructed worlds.

Currently, research does not exist that analyzes the costs of serious leisure beyond the three types originally put forth by Stebbins (1992) (disappointments, dislikes, and tensions). What is lacking in the research is a substantive analysis of the type and degree of serious leisure costs. The existing framework presents an oversimplified, even trivialized estimation of the depth and extent to which participants sacrifice in serious leisure pursuits.

Stebbins (1992) has suggested that more activities are adopting a serious approach. While there are several unique dimensions to serious hunter/jumper equestrianism, many of the same types of behaviors—such as significant personal effort,

a meaningful subculture, and profound identification with the pursuit—can be found in other serious pursuits. This research attempts to shed light onto the unique dimensions of serious leisure in the context of hunter/jumper equestrianism, with the goal of improving our understanding of human-animal relationships and contemporary leisure behaviors.

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODS**

The data for this thesis were collected over two years between 2006 and 2008. The primary data on which this analysis is based comes from interviews. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants from Northern Colorado. Additionally, a secondary form of data came from my own observations as a participant in the social world of hunter/jumper equestrians. I used these two data sources to explore the behaviors, beliefs, understandings, and experiences within a natural environment; and to describe the social world through first-hand experience (Holloway and Todres 2003). While the interview phase was conducted over a six-month period, I participated in the research setting throughout the entire process of data collection and analysis, during which I was immersed within the research setting. The main aims of this project were to assess the social world of hunter/jumper equestrians, observe their behavior, and explore the way participants made sense of their social world.

### **MOTIVATION**

Similar to many individuals involved in qualitative research, my personal involvement and experience with this research setting played a large role in shaping my initial interest in this research topic (Lofland and Lofland 1995). My experience in the horse community has primarily been within the hunter/jumper discipline, which is a subculture within the larger world of competitive equestrian pursuits. Prior to the

initiation of this study, I was engaged with equestrian activities for 22 years, including more than 1,200 hours of riding lessons (English, primarily in the hunter/jumper discipline); more than 5,000 hours of “riding time” on more than 80 different horses; and more than 12,000 hours of other horse-related activities (cleaning tack, buying feed and equipment, doing barn chores, hauling horses). During this period of “progressive contextualization” (Schouten and McAlexander 1995:44) I, gained the experience and knowledge to evolve from an outsider to an insider and experienced several “rites of passage” (Celsi et al. 1993:5): learning to ride; mastering basic horsemanship skills; experiencing several horse-emergencies such as colic; successfully competing in many nationally rated horse shows; and winning several Colorado Hunter Jumper Association (CHJA) year-end awards. This background experience gave me credibility and insider-status when I began the interview phase of this study in the spring of 2007.

As both a rider and owner, I have been involved with this community of horse people in Northern Colorado for over seven years. My involvement included observing and participating in multi-day clinics, horse shows, stock shows, horse performances and rodeos; joining horse-related organizations; attending horse-related awards banquets; and reading horse-related books, magazines, trade journals, and online blogs. I was a full participant and known observer in this setting. My role as an insider in this context provided valuable insight and allowed access to participants and the setting. As an insider, I was able to identify with my subjects through past experiences and common knowledge. However, as an insider my relationships with the women I interviewed were long-term and not based solely on my research. My relationships with most of the women predated this project and likely affected the research process in both positive and negative



ways. Positive impacts of my insider status included access to participants, an understanding of horse behavior, the knowledge to encourage a broad range of communication from participants, and a nuanced understanding of their cultural ways. Negative impacts of my insider status may have included allowing participants to use short-hand language and not elaborate as fully as they might to an outsider, and potentially leading participants to feel that, as a researcher, I was judging their answers or unconsciously encouraging socially desirable rather than truthful answers. My insider status and the similarities I shared with participants, in terms of experiences and knowledge, undoubtedly affected the research process. It also made it more challenging for me to objectively problematize the research context as well.

## **WOMEN HORSE OWNERS**

This thesis examines women's relationships with horses. It focuses exclusively on women because men's relationships with horses have historically been given priority over women's relationships (Brandt 2005). The preference literature and research have given to highlighting men's relationships over women's does not mirror the reality of horse ownership. As noted previously, in the United States, women own over 80% of all horses (Miller 1999) and constitute 90% of the exhibitors showing at local and state horse shows (Folks 2006). At world horse shows, women comprise almost all entries in amateur divisions, while men make up the majority of professionals, and entries in open divisions, which do not have restrictions for entry and are thus, 'open' to all participants, professional and amateur alike (Folks 2006).

In Colorado, the horse industry involves 102,400 people, with 55,700 owners and 256,000 horses (American Horse Council Foundation 2005). These 256,000 horses represent the following activities: 10,100 in racing; 77,000 in showing; 106,000 in recreation; and 61,800 in other activities. Nationally, the majority of horse owners had an annual household income of \$74,999 or less (53%), while only 10% report annual income over \$150,000 (AVMA 2007). Additionally, the largest age group of horse owners is 45-59 year olds (44%), and another 44% of horse owners comprise the two age groups between 18-44 years old (AVMA 2007).

## **SAMPLE**

The demographics of participants in this study were similar to state and national demographics of the horse industry; however, all participants were female. As noted earlier, women's experiences with horses have been given little attention in previous research, and this study aims to give those experiences a voice, both because of their historic silence and the statistical majority of recreational and amateur horse owners women represent. Additionally, no amateur men boarded a horse at the facility where a majority of participants boarded their horses.

I interviewed fifteen women for this study. Their ages ranged from 19-58, with a median age of 33. All were white, and the majority were middle to upper class.

Of the participants in this study, five owned one horse, four owned two horses, two owned three horses, two owned four, one owned six and one owned more than six. Eleven participants kept their horses at a boarding facility, three owned a boarding facility, and one kept horses both at home and a boarding facility.

In terms of property ownership, four participants rented their home and kept horses at a boarding facility, seven owned their home and kept horses at a boarding facility, and four owned their home and kept horses at home. Regarding household income, six participants had a household income under \$25,000, four had a household income between \$30-45,000, four had a household income between \$46-75,000, and one had a household income over \$100,000. In terms of marital status, six participants were single, one was unmarried but living with a partner, five were married, two were divorced, and one was widowed. Regarding highest level of education, one participant earned a high school degree, two attended some college, eight earned a college degree and three had more than a college degree.

## **GAINING ACCESS**

Locating women willing to talk about their experiences and relationships with horses was not difficult. Many were eager to express their opinions and to have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Although I knew most of the participants, some I only “knew of” through my involvement in equestrian activities, rather than knowing them personally. I utilized a snowball sampling methodology to recruit participants, whereby I asked participants to recommend other women within the setting, whom I then contacted via written letter, which described the purpose of this project. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails were made to assess interest and availability. None of the women contacted declined to participate in the study, although due to time conflicts some of the women initially contacted were not interviewed. Initial phone calls were also used to schedule a time and location for interviews. Interviews took place in several locations:

residences, outside a workplace, and most frequently at the boarding stable where the majority of participants kept their horses. All interviews took place in private settings, either in a closed-door room, or outdoors and away from other people, often in the company of the participant's horse. All participants signed a consent form, which outlined the purpose and risks involved with participation in this project before commencing the interview. Additionally, all participants were given the opportunity to leave the interview at any point, as well as the option to refuse to answer any questions. However, no participant utilized either option.

## **INTERVIEWS**

The interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to two hours, with forty-five minutes being the average length. All interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and were transcribed verbatim between February and April of 2007. Permission to record the interviews was requested prior to the interview, and all participants were given the option to refuse use of the tape recorder; however, no participants utilized this option. Each participant was assigned an identification number, 001 through 015, which were used in the transcripts rather than names. In writing this thesis, each participant and all horses were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for each interview, which consisted of five sections. Appendix A contains a sample interview schedule. The interview questions were open-ended and participants were encouraged to use stories and narrative in their responses.

## **OBSERVATION**

I engaged in observation as a participant in the research setting over a two-year period, between 2006 and 2008. Several different classifications of participant observer roles have been proposed to explain researcher involvement levels. Using Adler and Adler's (1987) classification, I engaged as a complete member, whereby I "immersed [myself] fully in the group as a 'native'" (p.67). In this role, I related to participants as status equals, who were "dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals" (Adler and Adler 1987:67). In this role, I was able to observe and participate in the setting. However, during this time I engaged in taking limited field notes and for this reason my observations provided a secondary source of data to my primary data that came from interviews. By participating, I was not an outsider who did not know or understand horses or who was judgmental of their attitudes and behaviors. Rather, I was a fellow horse-person who was curious about our shared activity.

My role as a full participant included the roles of owner, rider, and competitor, to which the added role of researcher was facilitated in large degree by my relationship with my own horse, April. Many advocates of participant observation methods promote the use of cultural informants or key actors. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) suggested, "working with informants is the hallmark of ethnographic field work" (p.41). Indeed, informants are "often able to supply researchers with information that they may be unable to attain under any other circumstances" (Yoder 1995:94). In this sense, April played the role of informant or key actress in this project, providing me with valuable insider knowledge, credibility, and access, as well as supplying a rich source for observation and insight.

An invaluable benefit of my relationship with April was the insider access it granted me to the social environment of the boarding facility where I rode and stabled her. There were many other women like myself who rode, stabled, and spent a considerable amount of time with their horses and with whom I was able to observe and participate. A boarding stable is often a train-station-like hub of horse-based social interaction, with many different things occurring simultaneously. I participated in and observed hundreds of hours of riding lessons, riding preparation, horse care, competitions, vet calls, farrier appointments, clinics, pre-purchase exams, long-term injury and illness care, and I watched all levels of riders from a beginner's first lesson to seasoned professionals. Detailed note taking was inappropriate during my observations because of the casual nature of horse activities and because of my desire to minimize my impact as a researcher who wanted to be as non-disruptive as possible. Consequently, many of the field notes based on participation observation were recorded at a later time. Also, in an effort to avoid any assumed interpretations conferred by my insider status and to maintain reflexivity, as I analyzed the transcripts and began coding, I wrote down detailed notes based on observations in a journal, based on the claims of participants and themes that appeared from the interviews.

Many leisure researchers have been critical of the field's "over-reliance on survey methods that yield strictly quantitative data" (Scott and Godbey 1990:189) and the resultant "impoverished perspective of the subject matter" (Yoder 1995:80). Goodale (1990) suggested, "leisure research has become increasingly positivist, operationalist and reductionist" (p.296). In responding to traditional studies' demand for hard quantitative data, Yoder (1995) noted "such traditional studies' claims of objectivity are now being

challenged, as there is a growing recognition by social researchers that subjective decisions are made throughout the entire life of the research process” (p.80). As a result, leisure scholars have urged researchers to use a wider variety of research methods (Scott and Godbey 1990) and to consider the subjective nature of leisure (Glancy 1993).

Participant observation has been specifically identified as a valuable research method for the study of the social aspect of leisure and which is applicable for a wide range of leisure settings (Glancy 1993).

### **PROS AND CONS OF BEING AN INSIDER**

Although there is no single standard form of ethnography (Mueck 1994), there are, however, many principles of ethnographic research that I employed in this research. In the spectrum of ethnographic methods, this project falls within the category of participant observation. This has some advantages and a few limitations. My role as an insider conferred four distinct advantages. First, as an insider I was able to phrase questions in a manner more comfortable and meaningful to participants and respond in a manner that most effectively encouraged a broad range of communication. Even prior to the start of my research, I had established a ‘cultural fluency’ that would take an outsider years to achieve. Second, my insider role gave me access to people who would have been reluctant to grant access and respond intimately to an outsider. Third, my insider role gave me access to aspects of the setting from which outsiders would have been excluded, such as unplanned trail rides with other boarders, spontaneous conversations, etc. Lastly, as an insider I was able to “immerse myself in [the] culture,” blend into situations, and was less likely to alter social situations (Fetterman 1989:45). As an insider, participants

talked with me in the same way they talked with their friends or other owners, even when sharing intimate or embarrassing stories.

However, my role as an insider also carried with it limitations. Most notably, my research as an insider contained the potential for bias, perhaps to a higher degree than other methods of research. This bias can potentially originate from two sources: the impact of the researcher on the participants' behavior and the impact of the researcher's own beliefs. The issue of objectivity is also of particular relevance to feminist and human-animal studies research. Feminist inquiry challenges the belief in the necessity, and possibility, of objectivity and a value-free observer. Donna Haraway (1996) argues, "feminist inquiry must acknowledge that views are always from somewhere (situated), not nowhere" (p.254). Feminist objectivity, Haraway (1996) argues, "is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object, it allows us to become answerable for what we learn to see (p.254). Human-animal studies researchers Arluke and Sanders (1993) similarly challenge traditional views of objectivity, stating, "human-animal research requires that the researcher, to some extent, comes to see the world through the eyes of the animal" and that "the investigator be intimately involved with the animal-Other and the researcher's disciplined attention to his or her emotional experience can serve as an invaluable source of understanding" (p.378). Thus, aiming for value-free observation and objectivity in leisure and human-animal studies research would be a hindrance to data collection by silencing the emotions, experiences and insights of researcher participants.

Reflexivity, as opposed to objectivity, is a principle of ethnographic research methodology that requires the use of mechanisms to 'make problematic' the research



setting and role of participant researcher (Lofland and Lofland 1995). In her study of language with humans and horses, Brandt (2005) suggests using a “beginner’s mind” to gather rich and descriptive data (p.21). As a complete member of the research setting, already in possession of insider knowledge, utilizing the idea of a ‘beginner’s mind’ allowed me to reflexively challenge my automatic understandings of the setting, participants, and my role as researcher. By engaging in a process of reflexivity, constantly questioning what I was observing and learning, I was able to maintain a ‘beginner’s mind’ and avoid the assumed interpretations my insider knowledge suggested.

Unlike many ethnographers, I did not enter the research setting at a specified time and then leave when my research was finished. My relationships with most of the participants were not short lived; they existed prior to this research and most likely will continue long after as well. As I began my research, I was concerned about how my new role would affect the participants, and I became self-conscious that participants felt like I was judging or evaluating them. However, I observed no changes in participants’ behavior during my transition into, during, and out of the role of researcher. Instead, participants expressed interest in my research, often seeking me out to share additional insights or discuss my findings. These informal discussions also provided me a time to clarify and affirm events and stories from my observations. As Brandt (2004) described in her research on women and horses, the horse owners in this study were collaborators in this research. The combination of using reflexivity and a ‘beginner’s mind’ as well as collaborative participants and multiple research methods helped limit the negative effect of my insider status on the findings of this research.

## **ANALYSIS**

The qualitative data generated from observation and interviews were used to describe the social world of hunter/jumper horse owners, determine levels of involvement with the sport, as well as the types and levels of cost of involvement. This study was informed by the body of existing research in the core areas of leisure and human-animal studies, and the analysis utilized grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin 1990) to “test previous theory and propositions,” as well as “generate new theory that was rich and dense and revealed the reality I was investigating” (Yoder 1995:111).

The grounded theory and techniques developed by Glaser and Strauss (1968) and refined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) address the three major types, and proper use of coding. Coding represents “the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualized and put back together in new ways” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:57). Coding, in their conception, should balance the two elements of scientific procedure, which “gives the research the rigor necessary for good science” and creativity that “is essential for the development of grounded theory” (Yoder 1995:111).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed three major types of coding: open, axial and selective, all of which were utilized in analyzing the data generated by participant observation and interviews. Using open coding, I began by breaking down each transcript or observation and giving each part or concept a name or label. I then generated a classification of names and themes through a continual process of comparison and evaluation. I used open coding to take apart the raw data, and axial coding to reassemble these parts in a new and meaningful way. Using selective coding I further established and verified the principle categories, engaging in what Yoder (1995) reflected as “similar to

axial coding but operating on a more abstract level” (p.112). This phase of coding attempted to integrate as much information as possible into one or two theoretical explanations, specifically: the Serious Leisure Perspective and several key principles draw from the less cohesive body of human-animal studies.

This research benefited greatly from the intelligent, articulate, and talented women who shared their experiences with horses with me. Because research exploring hunter/jumper equestrianism and serious leisure does not exist, I utilized direct quotations from participants to illustrate specific concepts in this research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR STRUCTURAL DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS OF HUNTER/JUMPER EQUESTRIANISM**

Amateurism is a historical phenomenon that has resulted from the emergence of professionals within fields that were previously considered purely play or a carefree refuge from the serious sphere of work. As professionalization occurs, those who continue their serious, but part-time commitment to the pursuit are gradually transformed into amateurs (Stebbins 1992). The presence of professionals reshapes the pursuit by introducing new standards of performance excellence, increased complexity of knowledge and instrumentation, and expanded training requirements (Stebbins 1992). Thus, the distinction between amateurs, who have professional counterparts, and hobbyists, who do not, is an important one in shaping the nature and experience of participants in the pursuit.

The current literature classifies equestrianism as a hobbyist activity. Stebbins' (1992) bases this definition on his perception that equestrianism does not contain a group of professionals, and on his belief that horses are objects without a subjective presence. However, this definition ignores two central elements of equestrianism: the visible presence of professional riders and the intersubjectivity achieved between horses and riders. I contend that the features of equestrianism warrant reclassifying it from a hobbyist activity to an amateur pursuit.

In defining serious leisure, Stebbins (2007) identified three distinct types: amateur pursuits, hobbyist activities, and career volunteers. Although these three forms are similar

categorically, as types of serious leisure, significant differences exist between these three forms. Of central importance to this thesis is the delineation between amateur pursuits and hobbyist activities. The essential element distinguishing amateur pursuits from hobbyist activities is the visible and influential presence of professionals, found in amateur pursuits and absent in hobbyist activities. Professionals, in Stebbins' (2007) conception, are defined in economic terms as individuals who are "dependent on the income from an activity that other people pursue with little or no remuneration as leisure" (p.6). It is amateurs' position in a system of relations with professionals and that defines and distinguishes them from hobbyists. Stebbins (2007) argues, "amateurs are locked in and therefore further defined...by their place in a professional-amateur-public [P-A-P] system of relations" (p.7).

In contrast to amateur pursuits, hobbyist activities lack a visible and influential group of professionals. Stebbins (1992) defined hobbyist activities as "a specialized pursuit beyond one's occupation, a pursuit that one finds particularly interesting and enjoyable because of its durable benefits" (p.10). Hobbyists are further classified as five types: collectors; makers and tinkerers; activity participants (in non-competitive, rule-based pursuits, including nature-challenges); players of sport and games (in competitive, rule-based pursuits with no professional counterparts); and liberal arts enthusiasts. Essential to the categorization of hobbyist activities is their lack of professional counterparts.

Two types of human-animal activities are identified in the literature as forms of serious leisure: dog sports and horseback riding, which are both classified as hobbyist activities. However, these two types have been classified as different types of hobbyist

activities. Dog sports are classified as a making-tinkering hobby, because in Stebbins' (2007) view "owners breed and train their pets to compete in various competitions," and essentially "make their dogs into competitive animals [objects]" (p.29). Horseback riding, on the other hand, is classified as a non-competitive, rule-based activity, specifically a type termed "nature challenge activities" (Stebbins 2007:9). A nature challenge activity is a type of leisure in which the "core activity or activities center on meeting a natural test posed by one or more of six elements: air, water, land, animals, plants, or ice or snow" (Stebbins 2009:1). For Stebbins (2007), horseback riding is a nature challenge activity, centering on "the challenge posed by nature" (p.9).

There are two primary problems in Stebbins' definition of equestrianism as a hobbyist activity. First, at the structural, or organizational level, there exists a visible and influential group of professionals in equestrianism, the existence of which satisfies Stebbins' (2007) criteria for classifying an amateur pursuit. The second is an interactional level problem, in the specific identification of equestrianism as a nature challenge activity. This classification views horses as "elements [or objects] of nature" and reduces equestrianism to interactions between humans and objects, akin to interactions between humans and computers (Turkle 1984), automobiles or any other inanimate object (Cohen 1989), by projecting humanlike attributes onto them (Stebbins 2009:1).

In contrast to this view, I contend that the interactions between humans and horses are premised on intersubjectivity, and are only possible between two minded, sensate subjects, rather than passive mindless objects, made and shaped to the liking of humans. Horses' subjectivity gives meaning to the participants in equestrianism and the relationships co-constructed by humans and horses through action that are the central

focus of equestrianism. This view counters the “masculinist, positivist, structuralist, reductionist view of the ‘natural’ world and the place of ‘man’ in that world” (Arluke and Sanders 1993:386). The participants in this study offer a view of horses as subjects-in-interaction, rather than as fixed objects in “nature,” of which humans are not a part, thus, the presence of a visible and influential group of professionals that warrants reclassifying equestrianism as an amateur pursuit; and the intersubjectivity between horses and human that negates its definition as a nature challenge activity.

### **PRESENCE OF PROFESSIONALS**

Stebbins’ (2007) criterion for classifying amateur pursuits is the presence of professionals in a pursuit whose enactment of the pursuit’s core activity is sufficiently visible to the amateurs in that field so as to influence their attitudes and behaviors. Structurally, amateur pursuits are defined by the presence of professionals and amateurs; however, two other groups play a role in shaping these pursuits: publics and commodity agents. These groups influence each other and the nature of amateur pursuits. Of significance to this study is the finding by Yoder (1995) that publics can be composed primarily of amateurs, and he suggests it is more “appropriate to think of this group of amateurs/publics” (p.149). Thus, despite the possible influence of commodity agents, of structural relevance to the definition of equestrianism as an amateur pursuit rather than hobbyist activity, is the evaluation of two groups: professionals and amateurs/publics.

### *Professionals*

The professional, who makes a living from riding in the top-level international competitions, forms a visible group of men and women who earn large monetary rewards from winning events. Out of 320 United States' riders competing in grand prix events of \$25,000 or more, researchers for the United States Equestrian Federation (2010) found that between December 1, 2009 and March 12, 2010, over 60 United States' riders earned \$3000 or more in prize money; over 30 riders earned over \$10,000; 19 earned over \$20,000; 14 earned over \$30,000; and six earned over \$40,000. These professional equestrians, as well as international riders who compete in the U.S. (and on whom earnings information is not available), earn a living from the core activity of riding.

Professional equestrian riders are often sponsored or supported by one or more commodity manufacturers, and the purchase of these goods and services by amateurs/publics in turn contributes to the professional rider. However, within hunter/jumper equestrianism there are also individuals who earn their living within the sport as teachers or trainers. These individuals, although no less significant to the riders, do play a noticeably less public role. Professional trainers are generally client-centered and are not the trendsetters in the field who are idolized by the amateurs/publics. Professional riders, however, are generally public-centered, and their enactment of the core activity of riding serves to influence the behaviors and attitudes of amateurs and the public.



### *Amateurs/Publics*

In addition to professionals, the group composed of amateurs/publics is an essential component in defining equestrianism as an amateur pursuit. Amateurs/publics support the pursuit in several ways: providing performance feedback, both positive and negative; volunteer labor for competitions and events; and through purchasing horse-related commodities.

Amateur riders, and the hunter/jumper public, recognize a group of professional heroes of their sport, and demonstrate, at varying levels, a desire to observe, learn from, and engage with them. The 2007 Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) World Cup in Las Vegas, NV, attracted crowds of over 85,000 spectators, from 25 countries, and all 50 states, generating over \$23 million in non-gaming revenue to watch 45 riders compete. The 2010 World Equestrian Games (WEG), scheduled for September 25 through October 10, 2010 in Lexington, KY is expected to draw crowds of over 500,000 spectators, including over 10,000 event volunteers and generate over \$167 million for the state of Kentucky. Of the participants in this study, eight reported previously traveling out of state to attend the 2007 World Cup; five attended the 2005 World Cup and 4 planned on attending all or a portion of the 2010 WEG. All of the participants reported having attended an international equestrian event, with a majority having traveled out of state to do so. Attending such events served two purposes: to affirm participants' group identity and to observe professionals enacting the core activity of their pursuit (Shipway and Jones 2008).

International competitions, such as the 2007 FEI World Cup in Las Vegas, NV, or 2010 WEG in Kentucky are held relatively infrequently in the U.S. National

competitions, in which a few international professional riders frequently participate, are much more common. National events usually attract large crowds, drawn primarily to the highest jumping event, the grand prix. The National Western Stock show is an example of a large national grand prix event. The grand prix itself is typically held for two to three hours on a Saturday evening, a few hours after the other horse show events have finished. The event itself is situated within a three-day hunter/jumper competition, and in the case of National Western, the hunter/jumper show is itself held within a three-week long horse and livestock event. Surrounding the national hunter/jumper horse show is a vendor show, offering the latest equipment, from trailers, trucks, and tractors, to boots, belt buckles, and baling twine, supplies, tack, clothing, and horses for sale.

As for the grand prix competition, a regionally recognized singer begins the event by singing the National Anthem, after which the announcer typically walks the audience through the course, describing the unique challenges the course designer has created for the horses and riders. Each horse/rider pair enters the arena alone, and typically, in the forty-five seconds they are given before crossing the start timers, the announcer will read a biography for the duo. Successful pairs completing the course without incurring any faults (e.g., knocking down a jump rail, completing the course slower than the time allowed, a horse's refusal at a jump, etc.) advance to a second round, called the jump-off. Typically, all pairs completing the first course receive applause from the audience, but pairs that do not incur any faults and advance to the jump-off receive a much more enthusiastic applause. The jump-off is a second course, with between twenty-five and thirty-five percent of the number of jumps compared to the first round. For grand prix events, the jump-off decides the winner, so the fastest time over the course without faults

wins. For the audience, the jump-off is the extended grand finale, where a small number of pairs compete at faster speeds, over higher jumps, and over a shorter course to determine the winner. Each pair usually receives an energetic applause at the end of their round, but the top pairs often receive a hearty standing ovation for their superior performance. Following the last pair, the top eight to twelve pairs are brought back into the arena together, the results are announced, and prizes are awarded. The winners then lead the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> place pairs in a 'victory gallop' around the arena, during which the audience sometimes throws flowers to their favorite pair and many of the award winners often give their prize ribbons to young audience members: a highlight regardless of age.

At the opposite end of the competition spectrum, local horse shows, referred to as non-rated or schooling shows, rarely attract an audience other than those individuals participating in the event. In over 45 regional Colorado Hunter Jumper Association (CHJA) horse shows observed over two years, less than ten percent of the events attracted any spectators other than the participants. The most common non-participant spectators were parents and family members, almost exclusively of junior (under age 18) riders. There is little fanfare or celebrity surrounding these events, and it was common for results or prizes not to be publically announced. However, participants must, and do, track down horse show officials or managers to find out their placings and get their hard-earned ribbons.

Stebbins (1992) and Baldwin and Norris (1999) found that serious leisure participants often take on multiple roles in their pursuit. This can particularly be seen in hunter/jumper events where amateurs constitute the largest segment of audiences for

professionals and other amateurs alike. Amateurs often simultaneously adopt the roles of producers and consumers. Amateurs competing in horse shows are often well educated and informed about a multitude of horse-related topics, including nutrition, veterinary care, training, equipment, and horse care. Of the participants in this study, thirteen have at some point taken on roles in addition to amateur rider and owner, including veterinary technician (3), groom (4), judge (3), horse show manager (3), or event volunteer (13).

Formal status roles adopted by the participants in this study include being a horse show manager (Meghan<sup>5</sup>); serving or being nominated to serve as president or other executive level position in a discipline or breed association (Amy, Patricia, Meghan); and being licensed in some aspect of judging, course designing, or as a show steward (Patricia). Additionally, pursuing educational degrees or employment in horse-related fields was a type of formal status roles adopted by participants (Sara, Lee, Molly, Alice, Kendra). Informal status roles adopted by participants in this study include competition success as a rider (Emma, Meghan, Molly, Eileen), association with a successful horse (Amy, Emma, Lucy, Patricia, Erica, Meghan, Molly), volunteering at events (Emma, Sara, Meghan, Molly), participation in larger regional and national shows (Emma, Meghan, Molly, Eileen), riding or watching clinics (Amy, Emma, Sara, Lucy, Meghan, Molly, Natalie), and association with other equestrians (all participants). Although there does not appear to be a sequential progression for adopting specific roles, riders seemed to adopt several informal roles before adopting any formal roles. The formal and informal status roles adopted by amateurs served to intensify participants' commitment to the pursuit and blur the skill and knowledge boundary that separates amateurs and professionals (Baldwin and Norris 1999).

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms have been used instead of participants' names to ensure anonymity

Using Stebbins' (2007) criteria alone warrants classifying equestrianism as an amateur pursuit. The visible and influential presence of professionals, whose enactment of the core activity, riding, is regarded by amateurs as the goal of, or embodiment of the pursuit. However, Stebbins' classification of horseback riding as a hobbyist activity contains a second problem: specifically, its identification of equestrian pursuits as nature challenge activities.

### **INTERSUBJECTIVITY WITH HORSES**

Central to the current classification of equestrianism as a hobbyist activity is the view that riders' challenge comes from 'mastering' or 'beating' an element of nature (Stebbins 2007). In addition to his perception that equestrian pursuits are hobbyist activities because they lack a visible group of professionals, Stebbins' (2007) specifically classifies equestrian pursuits as a type of hobby he terms 'nature challenge.' Beyond the inaccuracy of Stebbins (2007) conception that horseback riding primarily involves 'beating nature' are two flaws. First, that riders are 'beating' or 'overcoming' the object of challenge, and second, that a horse is akin to other types of 'nature' identified in the same classification: air (parachuting), water (kayaking), land (caving), plants (mushrooming), and ice or snow (backcountry skiing). The inclusion of animals in this classification demonstrates the view that animals are objects, devoid of a mind or sense of self, existing in the dichotomous world of "nature," which excluded from human capacities are essentially fixed, mindless and insensate.

In opposition to this view, I contend that horses, as opposed to air, water, and land, are minded, sensate beings, who like humans have a subjective experience that is

based on a mind, emotion, and a sense of self. Air, water, and land do not have agency, or the capacity to subjectively change their behavior; while horses, humans, and animals use memories of past experiences, emotional, and instinctual reasoning to subjectively interpret their environment and choose a course of action among alternatives. Such a view requires a reformulation of symbolic interactionism that acknowledges the potential of body movements, touches, and expressions to communicate subjective meaning without the presence of spoken language.

Communication occurs not only through spoken language, but also through non-verbal actions, such as body movements, gestures and touches, expressions, postures and body positioning, and eye movements. Researchers (Engleberg 2006) currently estimate that 20-40 percent of communication is based solely on spoken words; the other 60-80 percent is based on non-verbal action. Deprivileging the role of spoken language allows for the possibility of understanding the subjective presence of others through non-verbal means. Through their actions, humans and horses are able to develop an intersubjective understanding of each other (Brandt 2005). Intersubjectivity is an important concept in symbolic interactionism because it provides the foundation for meaningful interaction (Brandt 2005). In explaining the basis of intersubjectivity, Sanders (1999) argues it is “the assumption that one can ascertain, or at least estimate with some degree of certainty, the feelings, thoughts, and interactions of others” (p.141). Thus, intersubjectivity forms the basis from which thoughtful, emotional, and joint interaction can take place.

Using the foundation of work on interactions with alingual and humans with disabilities, which challenged Mead’s (1962) exclusion of certain beings from consideration as “persons,” researchers Alger and Alger (1997) and Sanders (1993) argue

that just as the caretakers of alingual and humans with disabilities come to understand their subjective presence through a process of constructing a “person” identity for them, so too do dog and cat owners construct a “personlike” identity for their pets. Using the categories of evidence identified by Bogden and Taylor (1989), Sanders (1993) suggests four dimensions to the process of constructing a “personlike” identity: (1) attributing thinking to the Other, and seeing the Other as minded; (2) the Other is seen as an individual, as a unique ‘self;’ (3) the Other is viewed as reciprocating and emotional; and (4) the Other is incorporated into a social place (Alger and Alger 1997; Bogden and Taylor 1989; Sanders 1993). Alger and Alger (1997) and Sanders (1993) found dog and cat owners used the same “categories of evidence” to attribute mindedness to their pets as identified by Bogden and Taylor (1989) in their study of caretakers of humans with severe disabilities.

This view provides a reformulation of the interactionist perspective of the mind as an individual internal conversation or object and reconceives of it as a more fully social construction. Like Gubrium’s (1986) and Sanders’ (1993) research, the horse owners in this study engaged in “doing mind:” they acted as agents who could identify and give voice to the subjective experience of their co-actors, horses (Gubrium 1986:47). Horse owners constructed a “personlike” identity for their horses, which acknowledged horses’ subjectivity and capacity for achieving intersubjectivity with humans. This “personlike” identity and the relationships between humans and horses are the central focus of equestrian pursuits, rather than the challenge of “beating nature” (Stebbins 2007:9). Although differing from dogs (Sanders 1993) and cats (Alger and Alger 1997) in size, way of thinking, and capacity to be ridden, horse owners similarly constructed a

“personlike” identity for their horses using the same ‘categories of evidence’ to regard their horses as minded, emotional individuals.

### *Minded Actors*

Essential to the process of constructing a “personlike” identity is the attribution of the Other as minded; that they are seen as thinking—able to reason, understand, and remember (Sanders 1993). Horse owners in this study described their horses as thinking, decision-making beings, who communicated their subjectivity through their actions. Owners overwhelmingly expressed the belief that their horses were thinking beings, with cognitive abilities varying by the individual. In exploring the dimensions of horses’ thinking, owners described horses as anticipating, understanding, remembering, and reasoning. Kendra explained her horse’s cognitive ability in these terms:

Horses definitely think, they choose what they want and then they make decisions about the best way to accomplish that goal. Now I’m not always sure how their logic or reasoning works sometimes, like if they don’t want their mane pulled, is dancing around and carrying on in the cross-ties the best way to not get it pulled? I don’t necessarily think so, but it definitely shows that they chose what they wanted and made a decision about how they were going to go about getting it.

In terms of anticipating future events, horses were described as both having the ability to remember past events and to define the situation based on information from role-taking. Owners frequently spoke about their horses’ anticipation of their arrival at the barn. One participant described her horse waiting at her stall door before her accustomed arrival time (Emma). Horses were also seen as drawing from memories of past events in anticipating future events. Another participant described her horse as knowing the different cars she drove and waiting for her arrival when she saw or heard any of them (Jane).



Owners described their horses' as anticipating future events based on their memory of past events and taking on the role of the Other (usually the owner) to define a situation. Natalie explained her horse's anticipation of receiving a reward based on his memory and taking on the role of the Other to inform a definition of the situation (having a good ride):

He knows when he's been good that I give him something extra as a reward. As soon as I get off him, he's already in a hurry to get back to the barn. And the whole time I'm cleaning him up he's moving around, where normally he stands pretty still and sometimes even falls asleep. But he knows when he's been good and he's learned that when he's good he gets treats.

In their construction of a "personlike" identity for their horses, owners also viewed their horses' actions as demonstrating some form of reasoning, or problem solving. Lucy described her horse's action of figuring out how to open his stall door as demonstrating his ability to reason:

There was a period of several days, at least three or four, right after he moved into a new stall when he figured out how to let himself out of his stall. He was really calculating about it, he figured out the time when people left the barn and waited until everybody left, 'cause he knew if he did it when they were still there they would put him back in his stall. The first night I thought maybe, I didn't properly close the stall latch, but when he got out the second night too I knew he'd figured out how to open it. So I figured putting an eyebolt perpendicularly through the stall latch would outsmart him so he couldn't just pull up on the handle and get out. Well that night he just twisted it back vertically and got out. I think the next night I clipped a carabineer through the eyebolt, thinking there was no way he would get that off to open it. But he did, the next morning the stupid thing was lying in front of his door. He really figured out how to bite the hinge and unhook the carabineer from the eyebolt. I think that was the last night he got out 'cause after that we just turned the doors' hinges to the other side of the door so the latch was on the right side instead of the left and he just couldn't reach it. It's not that I ever outsmarted him, I just moved the latch where he couldn't reach it.

Some owners described their horses as going beyond concrete problem solving, such as that described by Lucy in the previous description, by behaving in ways that demonstrated reasoning that is more abstract. These horses acted in ways that were

thoughtfully intended to shape their owners' definition of the situation and manipulate their responses to desired ends. Many participants described their horses "begging" (Cecelia) or "acting hungry" (Molly) in an attempt to get their owners to give them more food. Molly also described her horse "acting scared" to avoid jumping particular jumps:

He'll come out and jump a jump ten days in a row when nobody is watching. Then on day eleven when we're taking a lesson, he comes out snorting like a fire-breathing dragon and puts on this whole show of being scared by a particular jump. At first I tried to make an issue out of it by getting him to go near it and that totally didn't work 'cause that was exactly what he wanted me to do, get caught up in his hissy-fit and believe that he was actually scared of the jump, so he didn't have to work. But a couple weeks ago, we tried instead to just buy into his act, so we'd skip that jump that he was pretending to be scared of at the beginning and just pretend it really was scary. Until after a little bit we'd start working close and closer to it until finally we just jumped it and it was too late for him to remember he it was suppose to be scary. See the great thing about him is, he loves jumping. Absolutely loves it. Once he gets working and into a course, you could detonate a bomb next to the arena and he wouldn't even notice until we left the ring and he was like 'holy crap where'd that big hole come from'? And he's so honest too that as soon as he jumps the supposedly scary jump he realizes the jokes on him and he'll walk right over and practically lick the scary jump, like 'okay, you win this one, I wasn't really scared.'

These quotes illustrate that owners viewed their horses as having cognitive abilities. Dimensions of thinking were perceived in horses' ability to anticipate, problem-solve, weigh alternatives, define the situation, and take on the role of the other to influence owners' behavior. Owners described their horses as having strong memories of past events and an ability to learn from past successes and failures. They also saw horses as able to reflect on past memories to inform future action, as complexly as defining the situation based on information from past role taking to choose a course of future action aimed at more successfully shaping owners' behavior. In sum, although horses' thoughts and behaviors were primarily 'wordless' (Terrace 1987), the humans interacting with them regarded them as consciously behaving so as to "achieve goals in the course of

routine social exchanges” (Arluke and Sanders 1993:41). Owners’ interpretations of their horses’ actions as ‘expressions of competence’ (Goode 1994), as thoughtfully constructed and reciprocating, illustrates the “pervasiveness of everyday encounters in prompting owners to regard their [horses] as minded co-actors” (Sanders 1993:207).

Owners’ lived experiences offer a view of horses as having minds, thoughts, the ability to reason, and as ‘negotiating meaning’ with their human associates (Mead 1962). These owners’ experiences repudiate the detached presumptions of Mead (1962) and Stebbins (2007) that animals have “no mind, no thought, and hence there is no meaning in [animal behavior] in the significant or self-conscious sense,” and human interaction with animals is merely the result of anthropomorphic projection (Strauss 1964:168). In constructing a “personlike” identity for their horses, owners interpreted their horses actions as indicating not only a mind but also a conscious self.

### *An Animal Self*

Like mindedness, the self is a product that is constructed through interactions within the context of relationships (Sanders 2007). Irvine (2004) provides a model of animal selfhood that details four self-experiences that arise from interaction and generate the “core-self” (p.9). She argues that as with other humans, “we cannot observe subjectivity directly. We perceive it indirectly, during interaction” (Irvine 2004, p. 9). These four self-experiences underlie and make us aware of subjectivity.

Irvine’s (2004) first self-experience is “agency,” the capacity for self-willed action (p.10). Agency is the actor’s awareness of having desires or wishes, control over one’s actions, and awareness of the felt consequences of those actions (Irvine 2004).

Owners often described their horse's agency using examples from training that demonstrated self-control. Irvine (2004) explains that self-control implies that the [horse] has a sense that he or she can initiate action, since in order to control one's self, one must first have a sense of will or volition. Natalie described her horse's demonstration of agency in these terms:

Gideon is definitely opinionated. I rode him in a clinic and I'll never forget that's what the clinician said. He said, 'that's a very opinionated horse.' And if you do something wrong he lets you know. He's so well trained through, he's the perfect school horse to learn with because he doesn't get carried away making an impression on you. In a course he'll always give you one mistake, where you don't get a distance right or whatever, where he'll fix your mistake but he'll only give you one. He knows that his riders are beginners and so he won't take it out on you the first time but after that first one he doesn't just give you the rest, you have to do it right.

As this participant explained, her horse provided evidence that he recognized his own agency and ability to take on the role of the Other (rider). In short, Gideon recognized that his actions could shape his rider's behavior in ways he defined as desirable.

Irvine's (2004) second self-experience, "coherence," is the ability to recognize and orient actions toward specific animal and human others (p.11). Horse owners indicated that their horses had the capacity to recognize distinct Others. For many owners, it often took several weeks, months, or even as long as a year for a newly acquired horse to begin recognizing them as distinct from Others. Cecelia described the first time her horse recognized her by nickering at her:

I know he really likes it when I'm there and that took a long time though, he didn't really, he'd been a farm horse with a lot of different riders, used for what they wanted him used for and he's so steady he would get all kinds of people on him. And he was never mistreated or abused, he was always well taken care of, and some of the people like Judy who loved him and took great care of him and he still nickers every time he sees her. He does know I'm his person now and that is, that did take a long time, I had him for a year before the first time he nickered for me. A full year, which is a long time. Before he was like, okay you know, she's mine

and I'm hers and we're a team. It took him a full year to really trust me and for us to work together to form a partnership. I think it takes a lot of work, both riding and on the ground to build that foundation before he decided I was his partner and I wasn't just visiting.

Similarly, Jane explained her horse's ability to recognize her and act differently towards her than Others:

With Barty, he was one that didn't really have a home for a little while. He had people who rode at the barn ride him for a while, you know maybe six months, nine months or something like that and then he'd get passed onto somebody else. So I think he kind of missed having an owner, that was his person. And it's funny 'cause when everybody at the barn kind of thought that he was lost and then within two weeks of me owning him he sort of became a different horse, where he had an owner and, which I'm not sure how he decided I was an owner, and not a temporary one, but they sort of said he came into his own once he decided we were a permanent team. He sometimes has let other people know who have ridden him that he was not happy with them, as in he bucked somebody off. He's never done anything to me that was, indicated anything that, alright he's been cranky with me at times, but little crankiness was not I'm going to make an impression on you crankiness.

As these participants explained, horses demonstrated, through their actions, the ability to distinguish among Others. This distinction also allowed horses to demonstrate agency by orienting behavior towards specific Others.

The third element of the "core-self" discussed by Irvine (2004) is "affectivity," or the capacity for emotions (p.12). She distinguishes between categorical affects, such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and others that we typically think of as emotions; and vitality affects, which are ways of feeling, such as mood and vitality, and are characteristics of individual's core self, rather than ephemeral expressions of particular emotions (Irvine 2004). Horse owners identified both categorical and vitality affects in their horses.

Cecelia described categorical affects in her horse, Walden's display of sadness after the death of her other horse, Felix:

And after Felix died I was really sad, and Walden was too. He and Felix had been buddies. But Walden knew I was sad too 'cause he'd be in his stall, looking pretty sad, and then I'd come over and he'd perk up for a minute like he was trying to cheer me up but then we'd just stand there together, his head in my arms and I'd rest my head on his for awhile. 'Cause we were both just really sad Felix had died.

Owners also perceived vitality affects from their interaction with horses. Lucy described her horse as "sweet," described his overall calmness and happy disposition, rather than a discrete emotional state. Based on their interactional experience with horses' affective selves, owners came to see their horses as having a unique and identifiable personality (Sanders 2007). Natalie described her horse's personality as arrogant, in these terms:

Sirius has a certain standard he holds all his riders to, and if you're not riding right he'll give everybody one warning, but if you ignore it, especially if you ignore it, and don't at least try to ride better he'll buck you off. Every time. He's so arrogant, he thinks it's rude to not be ridden at a certain level and he'll tell you once, but after that he makes it clear he's not happy.

Owners frequently distinguished their horses by vitality affects, such as demeanor, temperament, and rideability. Often, owners utilized techniques of personification and metaphor to explain horses' vitality affects. Natalie used personification to explain a particular personality or attitude trait in their horse:

He has the high school quarterback mentality; he thinks he is very cool and he is, and he sometimes forgets who is in charge. He is like 'look at me.' And then we've been joking, and then when Neville rides him he thinks he's gone pro. That's why he gets so pumped, and that's why he's a good show horse, 'cause he goes in the show ring and likes to show off and he's like 'look at me, I'm hot stuff. People are looking.' But he is, he is a Dr. Jekyll, very sweet almost docile, very sweet on the ground and a little attitude when you're on his back.

Others used metaphors to explain their horse's personality:

And personality-wise he's endearingly obnoxious. And a little too athletic at times. That's my horse. He might possibly dress like the guys in Miami Vice. He's got chest hair, you've seen it. I'm like if he was a European man he would wear low cut shirts, a gold chain and have chest hair. And he would definitely ride.  
(Lucy)

As these participants demonstrated, horse owners viewed their horses' actions as communicating their affectivity. Horses were described both in terms of categorical affects such as a sad mood, and in terms of vitality affects such as an arrogant personality. Horses' affectivity communicated important dimensions of their subjective experience to their owners, such as their likes and dislikes, personality, and mood. These dimensions of affectivity, in turn, were used by owners to substantiate the belief of horses as individuals with distinct, unique characteristics that differentiate them from Others. Thus, horse owners interpreted their perception of horses' affectivity as indicating horses' subjectivity or 'self.'

The final element of Irvine's (2004) "core-self" is "self-history:" the past events, experiences, knowledge of others and places, preserved in non-verbal memory, and which provides the basis for self-in-relationship (p.14; Sanders 2007). In preemptive response to behaviorist critics' argument that animal responses to past experiences are simply the result of conditioning, Irvine (2004) distinguished between stimulus bound (motivated by external stimuli, and often explained as the result of conditioning) and stimulus free (prompted by internal factors) (Sanders 2007). Despite the simplicity of stimulus-bound explanations for animal behavior, by dismissing all responses as the unequivocal result of conditioning, they are inadequate in explaining contexts with various inputs, such as internal factors or memory.

Molly highlighted the difference between stimulus bound and stimulus free behavior in these terms:

I mean, it's one thing if a tarp comes flying past your horse while you're riding and he bolts sideways to get away from it, 'cause he's scared. But if he just decides to buck you off for no good reason and he's not scared, that's intentional, that's something he consciously decided 'I don't really like her today so I think I'll get rid of her.' They can't help it if they get scared, that's instinct, that's thousands of years of survival telling him his life depends on getting away from that tarp that is going to kill him. And I can't fault him for that, if I fall off, that's on me, not him. 'Cause 90 % of the time his instincts are right-on and keep both of us out of danger. But if he just bucks me off for fun, that's on him, that's something he chose to do, voluntarily, and that's not necessary. That's like somebody just cutting you off in line, rude and unnecessary.

Rarely did owners use a horse's history to explain traits owners' viewed as positive or desirable. The existence of desirable traits was often explained to be the result of the current owners' hard work, while undesirable traits were seen as the result of Others' (past owners') inferior ownership.

Also included in a horse's history were descriptions of how the horse had positively changed over time. Jane described her horse's positive change over her ownership in these terms:

Barty, he was one that didn't really have a home for a little while, so I think he missed having AN owner that was his person. And within two weeks of me owning him he sort of became a different horse, like he wasn't lost anymore. He sort of came into his own.

These quotes illustrate the view held by horse owners of their horses as unique individuals. In sum, horses act based on past experience, on affectivity, on the recognition that he or she is distinct from others and is the author of his/her own actions. Like the concept of the mind, the self is an intersubjective accomplishment rather than simply an object that others "indicate" (Sanders 2007). Horses, like humans, attain a 'self' through interaction with others. Irvine's (2004) four self-experiences allows for an



examination of horses' selfhood, which owners identified as an important component in the construction of a "personlike" identity for their horses. Owners' personal experiences with horses offer a view of horses as having subjectivity and selfhood, of which horses are consciously aware and because of which gives meaning to their behavior. Thus, owners' everyday experiences, or "critical commonsensism" (Hammersley 1989: 131) challenges the linguicentric exclusion of animals from the realms of meaning construction or authentic interaction by locating horses' self in the context of the physical body (Cooley 1964:168), emotional experience (Myers 1998), and as emerging from and displayed through, action and behavior (Irvine 2004; Sanders 2007).

### *Emotional and Reciprocating*

In constructing "personhood" for horses, owners perceived their horses to be both emotional and reciprocating; horses were perceived by their owners as giving something back to the relationship. As discussed in the previous section, horse owners perceived their horses to have the capacity for emotion, both in categorical and vitality affects. Owners perceived horses to be aware of and attuned to humans' affectivity. Several participants spoke of their horses' awareness of humans' emotions. Emma described her horse's awareness of her emotional state:

Seamus is the only thing that's kept me going this past year. He never knows exactly why I'm sad but he does know when I'm sad.

Participants also described their horses' actions as communicating a concern for humans' affectivity.

Emma further described her horse as aware of her categorical affects and as responding in a manner that conveyed empathy:

And he tries to cheer me up, he senses that I'm sad somehow and is more affectionate and stays around me for a while longer when he knows something's not right.

As this participant explained, owners understood their horses as having subjective experiences, in which some form of reasoning was linked to emotion. Owners saw their horses as experiencing a subjective world, in which the emotions of both self and Other played a role. Horses' ability to take on the role of the other was described by participants through both emotional interactions, which are directed at social goals (as described by Emma in the previous passage), and through practical interactions such as training. Social goals involve "at least two participants in the same location, who focus attention on the same object or action, and are aware that each other is maintaining this focus and share a common mood or emotion" (Collins 1989:17-18). These social goals develop out of 'natural interaction rituals' and the "mutual focus of the attention and common mood create a shared reality, in which the participants feel like members of a little group" (Alger and Alger 1997:70). Owners seemed most satisfied with their relationship with a particular horse when they viewed that horse as a partner or as emotionally reciprocating their love and affection. Lucy described her relationship with her horse as premised on reciprocal understanding and empathy.

My horse is so sweet. He takes care of me 100% of the time. Some days I'll go out to the barn and be kind of sad and he always makes more of an effort to be playful and try to cheer me up. And other days if he is feeling sore I try to make sure I'm understanding too and not work him too hard. We have an understanding that we both take care of the other one in the ways we can. He obviously can't take care of me when I'm sick, but he can protect me from danger when we're riding, and as far as I can tell, he does everything he can, and appreciates when I do the same for him.

In constructing a “personlike” identity for their horses, owners defined their horses as emotional and reciprocating beings. Horses’ actions were perceived by owners as demonstrating horses’ ability to define the situation, and take on the role of Other in both practical and social interactions. It is horses’ subjectivity, their reciprocating and affective capacity, which emerges from interaction that distinguishes them from emotionless automatons and gives meaning to their relationships with humans. Emma described horses’ reciprocity as the source of the meaning she derived from her relationships with horses:

I think all the pain and worry and injuries that we all go through are worth it because of the horses. We wouldn’t sacrifice like this to be race car drivers. It’s only worth it because the horses give back to you. You get out as much, probably more, than you put in.

As this quote illustrates, although humans ride horses, an instrumental capacity not shared by dogs or cats, humans regard their interactions with horses as qualitatively and substantively different from other entities with instrumental capacities. It is because horses are seen as emotional and reciprocating that humans ascribe meaning to relationships with them. Owners’ view their horses as having a sense of self, constructed of categorical and vitality affects and an empathetic awareness of Others’ affectivity. The lived experiences of owners’ challenge the notion that human interaction with animals is merely the result of anthropomorphic projection. Essentially, it is because horses have a mind, and a self that they can, using agency, choose actions that do not always coincide with humans’ desires. These instances when horses behave in ways that do not coincide with humans’ “projections of what they ‘should’ be like” provided further evidence that refutes the view of animals as objects of anthropomorphic projection (Irvine 2004:17).

The consequence of owners seeing horses as social actors whose “personhood” is constructed through the interactional process is that owners often described incorporating horses into the routine exchanges and routines that constituted their daily lives and intimate social networks (Sanders 2007).

### *A Social Space for Horses*

Unlike other companion animals, horses do not typically share a living space with humans. As a result, incorporating horses into the routine exchanges and rituals of owners’ daily lives required a concerted effort to enact routines and rituals in horses’ living space, rather than within humans’. While researchers (Alger and Alger 1997; Irvine 2004; Sanders 1993) have identified routines that humans share with dogs and cats that include typical household practices, such as feeding, preparing food, getting up in the morning, and going to bed at night, few, if any, horse owners share these same practices with their horses, due to their separated living spaces.

However, due in part to the confinement in a stall that is imposed by keeping horses at most boarding facilities and horses instrumental capacity to be ridden, owners frequently spent time in their horses’ living space and regularly made concerted efforts to incorporate their horses into rituals, such as celebrating their horses’ birthday, by preparing elaborate horse-safe cakes and cookies, or more simply bringing presents of carrots, apples, or extra treats. Interestingly, another ritual in which owners typically included their horses was Christmas or other religious holidays. Although usually a day to stay at home with family, horse owners took time away from home to bring the holiday celebration to the barn to include their horse. Actions such as these, as well as

participants' testimonies, indicate that in spite of not sharing a living space, which would facilitate sharing household practices with horses, owners still included their horses in meaningful rituals. Thus, as a species and due to their separation from humans' living space, horses can be seen as manifesting their capacity for symbolic interaction under different circumstances and conditions than dogs or cats.

Given the concerted effort participants' made to include horses in rituals that symbolize and constitute owners' daily lives, it is not surprising that many also considered their horses to be 'authentic' family members or close friends (Sanders 1993). Most frequently, horses were viewed as children. Meghan described her horses as "They're my children and I treat them as such." Similarly, Patricia explained her view of horses as akin to family members:

I guess I think of them as my kids...the horses are just as much a part of my family as my family is a part of my family. I don't really differentiate.

A sense of family-like commitment, permanence, and responsibility was described by many participants who viewed their horses as children. Alice described her commitment to her horse as "I love them. But. Yeah, I would do anything for them." Similarly, Meghan explained her on-going monetary commitment to her horses' well-being as "I will do anything and spend as much money as it takes to keep them healthy."

As a consequence of the on-going relationship owners shared with their horses, many developed what Collins' (1989) described as "natural interaction rituals," in which participants are mutually aware of focusing attention on the same object or action (Alger and Alger 1997:70). Such objects or actions can then become the basis for the emergence of "collective representations," which can then be called upon in the future to evoke the common mood and bond that united participants in a shared reality (Alger and Alger

1997:78). Emma described a special bit as the indicator of the shared reality of competing at a horse show:

I only use the pelham bit when we're at a show 'cause I don't want her to get too used to it if I used it every day. But after using it a couple times she knew it meant we were going to show and would perk up and get more animated. Even when it was a show at home and we hadn't hauled anywhere she still knew: pelham means horse show.

Thus, as Emma described, a pelham bit symbolized a shared reality, or 'collective representation' between horse and owner, which emerged from their 'natural interaction rituals'. The meaning of the bit, shared by both parties and their complimentary behaviors, resulted from both horse and owner taking on the role of the other and defining the situation in the same way. This "collective process" occurs when one party's (Emma's horse) clues as to how to behave come from the others' (Emma) (Alger and Alger 1997:78). In turn, this shared reality forms the basis for owners' perception of their horses as family members and close friends, rather than mere instruments of one-way interaction.

The participants in this study clearly interact with their horses as minded, emotional, reciprocating actors with a subjective 'self.' Horse owners' interactions with their horses suggest that horses uniquely contribute to owners' lives and sense of self in a way other factors do not. Horses' instrumental capacity to be ridden has contributed to the classification of horseback riding as a 'nature challenge activity,' from which the primary challenge from 'nature' is derived. Contrary to the view that horses are affectionless objects of "nature," akin to air, water, or land, the horse owners in this study specifically identified horses' as subjects, social actors-in-interaction, not recipients of Others' action. For these owners, equestrianism is emotionally meaningful because of

what they describe as intersubjective experiences with horses and the construction of a “personlike” identity for their horses. These participants draw on their personal, lived experiences with horses to challenge Stebbins’ (2007) detached and disconnected conception of equestrianism as either a ‘making and tinkering’ or ‘nature challenge’ hobby. These participants did not identify their horses as elements of “nature” or as objects to be “made” through humans’ subjugation and conquering. Rather, participants identified their horses as minded co-actors in the collective process of creating shared meaning with their human associates.

Thus, this study demonstrates that the features of equestrianism warrant reclassifying it from a hobbyist activity to an amateur pursuit. Equestrianism clearly contains a group of professionals whose enactment of the venerated core activity is both visible and influential to amateurs in the pursuit. According to Stebbins’ (2007) criteria, the mere existence of this group of professionals alone is sufficient to warrant classification as an amateur pursuit. However, this research goes further by dismantling two other features by which Stebbins (1998) classifies it as a hobbyist pursuit: that horses are objects “made” by humans and that horses are akin to other elements of “nature” (p.56, 59). The lived experiences of these horse owners provide evidence that the concepts of the mind and the self are constructed through social interaction, not finite objects possessed exclusively by humans, and that it is their horses’ subjectivity, or “personhood,” that makes their relationships and interactions with humans meaningful.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HUNTER/JUMPER EQUESTRIANISM**

Hunter/jumper equestrians take a serious, as opposed to a casual, approach to their pursuit, thereby demonstrating the characteristics that define serious leisure. Stebbins (2007) argues that both structural and social-psychological characteristics differentiate serious leisure from other forms of leisure (e.g. hobbyist, casual). In the previous chapter, I examined the structural characteristics of hunter/jumper equestrianism and argued that it met all the structural qualifications that define serious amateur pursuits. In this chapter I explore the six social-psychological characteristics that Stebbins (2007) argues distinguish serious leisure from other activities.

According to Stebbins' (2007) framework, six social-psychological characteristics define serious leisure. First is a willingness to persevere and overcome adversity to continue involvement in a pursuit. Second is through continued involvement, a leisure career is developed with five typical stages – beginner, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Additionally, a leisure career commences following one of two trajectories: childhood and adult entrants. Third is the significant personal effort devoted by participants based on specifically acquired knowledge, training, or skill. The fourth social-psychological characteristic is the existence of durable benefits for participants, including self-enrichment, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, and social interaction. Fifth, is the unique ethos that emerges from the pursuit, which is manifest in shared attitudes, practices, values, and goals. Last, is the tendency of



participants to identify strongly with the pursuit. In the following sections, I present evidence that equestrianism is consistent with Stebbins' definition of serious leisure on a social-psychological level.

## **PERSEVERANCE**

The notion of perseverance or overcoming adversity was a consistent theme in participants' interviews. The participants in this study were selected based on their serious approach to equestrianism, as evidenced in their length of involvement with horses, their length of horse ownership, and their weekly amount of time spent with horses. Thus, these results are only reflective of owners who take a serious approach to horse ownership and are not reflective of those who take a casual approach.

The average number of years of involvement with horses was 22.4 years, the average number of years of horse ownership was 15, and the average number of hours spent per week with horses was 12. Because this is a sample of experienced riders, stories of overcoming adversity are a predictable topic of discussion. Participants discussed perseverance through emotional, physical, and psychological conditions. Most often discussed were confronting danger, enduring injury—both theirs and their horse's—and persevering through anxiety.

Due to their large size, and their physiological and psychological nature, interacting with horses poses a danger uncommon with other pets. According to research, 70-80 percent of equestrian injuries occur while riding, with the most frequent cause of these injuries being riders falling off or being thrown from a horse (Campbell-Hewson et al. 1999; Ghosh et al. 2000). Interestingly, riders typically spend less time riding than

they do in unmounted activities; however, despite the larger proportion of time, unmounted injuries account for 20-30 percent of overall injuries. In unmounted injuries, the most frequent cause is being kicked or trodden upon by a horse (Campbell-Hewson et al. 1999; Ghosh et al. 2000). Natalie commented on confronting the danger posed by her horse's size:

Obviously, the horses have the danger issue, the safety issue; you have to pay a lot more attention when you're around the horses than you do when you're just out throwing a baseball with your friends. I mean their size makes them much more dangerous to be with, you have to constantly be aware of where your feet are, where your fingers are at any moment.

As Natalie described, unmounted interaction with horses required riders to be aware of theirs and their horse's physical presence in order to avoid injury.

Newer owners often faced a larger number of physically dangerous conditions due to their lack of experience and lack of awareness of the range of potentially dangerous situations. Jane explained her perseverance through physical danger as a new horse owner:

We went through a little bit of issues when I first got here where she would make it difficult for me to grab her, she would run around in her stall and turn her butt to me [a defensive position for a horse from which they are able to kick with their more powerful hind legs; a horse who turns their hindquarters towards a person or object is threatening or warning before kicking] and decide she wasn't going to get caught. I started bribing her, I would bring treats into her stall with me and she had to let me put the halter on and as soon as she let me put the halter on, she got her treat.

As Jane illustrated, persevering through physical danger often involves riders learning new skills or methods. Overcoming the physical danger posed by their horse resulted in riders often feeling a closer bond or deeper trust with their horse.

The danger posed by horses is magnified during riding activities, and the disproportionate percentage of injuries that occur while riding reflects this risk.

Miscommunication between horse and rider, as well as rider inexperience and errors, were two common causes of mounted injuries. Lucy commented on confronting the danger posed by miscommunication with her horse:

We went through some rough patches when I first got him and was showing him, some communication breakdowns you could call them. Where sometimes we would be in a class and he wouldn't understand what I was asking him to do and other times I would get really nervous, and he would sense that and take advantage of it by getting out of what I wanted him to do. But we've worked through most of that now and I think can use it to our advantage now, as our communication is stronger.

As Lucy described, horses occasionally misunderstand their riders' desires, and other times riders' inexperience can communicate an undesired message. Natalie spoke of how a rider's inexperience is unintentionally communicated to her horse and the physical danger she faces from the unintentional communication of such a message:

He's one that you have to keep in work, there's no fun lazy day. You have to be working him, trying to engage his mind to keep him occupied and challenged otherwise if you just relax and ride around the ring he won't listen to you, he figures you aren't up to the task of riding him and it's almost like he's insulted having an inferior rider. So if you don't measure up to his standards he'll buck you off or dump you somehow. He keeps me on my toes, keeps things exciting that's for sure. When he's being bad it's sometimes more exciting, 'cause I'm trying to not fall off but it's always an adventure.

Many riders also persevered through injury, both theirs and their horse's. All participants described enduring some degree of injury in their careers as equestrians.

Cecelia reflected on the universality of rider injuries:

If you're around horses often enough you will get injured. Everyone gets injured. It's just part of the deal.

As Cecelia explained the pervasiveness of human injury, she also highlighted the ordinary and trivial manner in which many participants described their injuries. For Cecelia and many other participants, physical injury was a source of inconvenience rather

than a deterrent to involvement. Cecelia further described her own physical injury as an annoyance but also as a source of pride:

I honestly don't know how many times I fell off my old gelding: hundreds, literally. I know I fell off him four times in one lesson, which I believe was the stable record. Other people have fallen off more times in succession but I have the record for most times in one lesson.

Recent injuries, as well as older ones, were discussed as illustrations of the participants' dedication to equestrianism. Emma explained a series of injuries she sustained during the previous winter:

I got hurt a lot this winter. Weird things. I had one spook and jump and just land on a foot. I had another, I got run over, absolutely run over by a horse that felt like getting hit by four linebackers. He spooked, it was windy in the indoor and I was undoing his cooler and he went over me like I wasn't even there, it felt like a tree. And bam! And I shouldn't have gotten up, but he was flying around the indoor and I had to get up and I'm looking at my hand and my hand is going woووоо [making a spinning motion with her hand]. You know, weird stuff; they were all freaky 'cause of the snow.

As a normal and accepted part of equestrianism, injuries were rarely described as a deterrent to participation. Natalie's discussion of her own and others' injuries highlights the normalcy of persevering through, almost ignoring, injury:

I remember back when somebody got hurt, was it when Molly got her concussion? Maybe, but someone got hurt out here and when I got a call at home my husband was like 'you people are worse than motor cross.' Well, I mean when I broke my leg riding Sirius, and this is really sad, I went and I got the cast and we were driving home and I'm looking at the cast and I'm like 'I could probably ride with this.' Everybody rides with injuries they've gotten from riding, like Patricia riding with her dislocated shoulder. I rode pregnant with both of my boys, broke my wrist riding while I was pregnant with one. But I was on, my doctor said I could ride up to a certain time and I was on the last lesson, I wasn't going to ride after that and I was on Emma's horse and he dumped me and I broke my wrist. Molly rode that maniac horse when she was pregnant, Lee rode with a broken ankle, Lucy rode and showed with a broken collarbone, Molly rode after getting a concussion before she went to the doctor.

As a source of pride and a benchmark of their dedication, participants acknowledged the inherent risk in equestrianism, but used the frequency and precedent of others' perseverance to justify their own risky behavior. Although humans' physical injuries were seen as inconvenient and trivial, physical injury to participants' horses were regarded in much graver terms. Many participants described making as many as five trips a day to the barn to check on or treat a horse's injury. Despite participants ignoring or abstaining from medical advice for their own injuries, most treated their horse's health with the utmost consideration. Alice explained the care her horse received during a recent injury:

My connection to my horse is probably about average, except when he's broken and then way above average because I'm out here at least three times a day, more when he first hurt himself, at least 45 minutes a trip with hand walking, blanketing, unblanketing, brushing him a little, giving him some cookies. It was probably more like five or six hours a day for the first week and then only three or four for the couple weeks after that.

Similarly, Lucy described spending more time with her horse when he was injured than when he was not:

When he's sound I try to ride him at least five times a week. But since he's not sound right now we're bonding seven days a week, usually twice but sometimes three times a day.

Horses' injuries provided time away from riding when many participants described strengthening their relationship with their horse. Jane explained the role of two injuries in strengthening her relationship with her last horse:

She had some injuries and I would go out and see her, first was a leg injury and I would go out and see her when she was on stall rest. That we really bonded over that, where when I would show up, in either of my cars, she knew I was there and would be waiting for me to come see her. Then she had colic surgery so she had three months of stall rest and I got her out two times a day during that and same thing. We really bonded over that.

Mutual perseverance by horse and owner through a horse's injury was commonly seen as one factor that helped strengthen humans' relationship with their horses. Perseverance required owners to spend time exclusively with their horses on non-riding activities. This time was described by many participants as strengthening their relationship with their horse, perhaps (as discussed in Chapter 4) as the result of shared emotions and intersubjective experiences. In addition to the physical elements of danger and injury, participants also overcame the mental obstacle of anxiety. Anxiety most often stemmed from concern about a horse's health and well-being. The wide range and seeming uncertainty of ailments and injuries suffered by horses was discussed by Emma as an obstacle requiring perseverance:

They do have a lot of, are subject to a lot of illnesses, colic you know being the main one. I mean you're constantly worrying about them. But it's just like with raising a family, you just deal with it. I mean it's part of being a family. My children get sick, the dogs get sick, the horses get sick, you just deal with it.

As well as enduring a relatively constant level of anxiety about their horses' health during normal conditions, participants encountered acute periods of anxiety when a horse was sick or injured. Alice commented on the effect uncertainty played in magnifying the anxiety caused by her horse's recent injury:

When they're accident-prone it all just sort of adds up. The x-rays and MRI's from yesterday are going to be so much fun to pay [sarcastically]. Especially when that vet came out and took all those images will probably have just as big a bill as the ABC vet who came out and basically told me he was fine and he just needed a couple stitches. It's frustrating to pay hundreds of dollars to vets who you have to trust 'cause I can't look inside his leg and see what's wrong, and they tell you different answers but you have to pay for all the answers, not just the one that's right.

As Alice reflected, the endurance of anxiety is challenged by a horse's acute injury as well as the element of uncertainty.

This uncertainty, as well as the value participants placed on their horse's health (both emotionally and financially) is exacerbated in participants prone to anxiety disorders, as exemplified by Meghan:

The constant worry about their well-being, especially for someone with an anxiety disorder like myself. And let's not even start about the stress of emergency situations such as colic or severe lameness. And the sheer amount of money you put into these animals. But it ends up being worth it.

Perseverance through the adversity—from physical danger, from financial costs, from emotional anxiety—faced by horse owners was justified by the benefits participants perceived from their involvement. As with other serious leisure pursuits, such as long-distance running (Shipway and Jones 2008) or tournament bass fishing (Yoder 1997), the occasional need to persevere helped to reinforce participant's dedication, as well as to provide a source of positive feelings from overcoming adversity.

## **LEISURE CAREER**

### *Stages*

Stebbins (2007) original framework and the literature on serious leisure argue that continued commitment to a pursuit engenders a leisure career, with five typical phases of involvement: beginner, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline. The essence of a leisure career lies in the temporal continuity of the activities associated with it, often involving the accumulation of rewards and prestige. Some stages in hunter/jumper equestrianism were hard to distinguish: particularly the boundaries between established and maintenance stages, especially if determination was made solely by the level of skills and knowledge.

Of the participants in this study, 13% were involved with horses for over 39 years, 53% for 20-29 years, 13% for 12-19 years, and 20% for 8-11 years. Career stages could not be determined solely on the number of years of involvement, as some of the members involved with horses the longest showed no signs of decline. Incorporating participants' degree of involvement with their length of involvement allowed for a more complete understanding of career stage, from which it was determined that none were beginners, 26% were in the development stage, 33% were in establishment, 40% in maintenance, and none were in decline. Additionally, while three individuals were self-reported professional trainers, none was a professional rider.

The beginning stage was relatively distinct according to Stebbins' framework. Beginners usually had a moderate interest and low lifetime involvement in the sport. The beginning stage was identifiable because of the wide disparity in skills and experience. Of the participants in this study, none were identified as a beginners. All had owned horses for a minimum of three years and been involved with horses for at least nine years.

In the development stage, the participants' interest became firmly rooted, and although these participants are no longer learning the basics, they are still learning about the sport and mastering intermediate skills. Approximately 26% of participants in this study were identified with the development stage. These participants had owned horses for an average of 8 years, and been involved with horses for 12.5 years.

After mastering the intermediate skills of the pursuit, participants determined their levels of involvement during the establishment stage. This included making decisions about how many shows they wanted to compete in; whether they wanted to compete at higher levels, in A or AA rated shows; the number of memberships and associations they



joined; and the possibility of investing in a towing vehicle and horse trailer.

Approximately 33% of participants in this study were classified in the establishment stage. These participants had owned horses for an average of 15 years and had been involved with horses for 20.5 years.

During this stage, participants may begin to experience conflicting commitments between the social world of horses and the 'real world.' Cecelia described a conflict that developed when her employer did not understand the difficulty she experienced over the death of her horse:

When my gelding was dying, it was a terrible time for me. So much so that I warned my boss; I told him my horse isn't going to live out this summer and when he dies it is going to be really bad. You need to know that I'm not going to be performing well when my horse dies. And sure enough my horse died and I was truant and he was surprised. My boss kind of complained, and I was like you know I told you I was going to be really bad and he was like I didn't know it was going to be this bad.

The uncertainties of getting established are typically resolved in the fourth stage, maintenance. Approximately 40% of participants in this study were identified with the maintenance stage. These participants had owned horses for an average of 26.5 years and had been involved with horses for 30.3 years; on average, an average of 91.6% of their lives. In this stage, riders had usually prioritized the social world of horses over competing commitments, and although this did not eliminate conflicts, participants at this stage were confident and accepting of their decisions. Molly noted that although her decision to prioritize horses was not always supported by others, at this point in her career she was confident in her choice:

It does take a lot of time you know and I don't really mind that, it has certainly made a distinct impression on my personal life, but eventually I just, I don't believe that something that is positive and a part of me that is not, and that is real, it's not something that can change. Um, you know I certainly would be richer and

have a lot more stuff if I didn't ride but I don't really care, you know, so I figure that the people that um, resent the time that I spend doing it have, that's their problem.

The final career stage, decline, is not experienced by all serious leisure participants, but those who do may experience it because of declining mental or physical health. Riding and caring for horses is physically demanding, and while none of the participants indicated they were in the stage of decline, a few mentioned that health and the long-term cost of accumulated injury were some things they did consider. Emma noted that her decision to not breed her mare a second time was based, in part, on her age and estimations of her ability to ride and care for an unborn horse's twenty-five year potential life, at which point she would be in her late eighties.

And you know, I thought a lot about breeding her a second time after Seamus was born and I saw how nicely he turned out. But then I got to thinking if I bred her again it would be at least another two years before the foal was even born. Add to that four or five before you can start training him, so that's what, seven years. And on top of that add twenty-five or thirty years that he'll live for and well I'm already almost sixty so I just don't know if I'm going to be doing this still when I'm ninety. So I just didn't think it was a good idea.

These quotes illustrate is that horse owners described involvement in equestrianism that corresponded to three of Stebbins' (2007) career stages: development, establishment, and maintenance. Due to participants' length and degree of involvement none were identified as beginners or as in decline. However, distinguishing participants' career stage based solely on cumulative length of involvement was problematic as such a determination failed to account for participants' intensity, or degree of involvement. Thus, analysis that incorporated both length and degree of involvement provided a more complete classification of career stages.

## *Trajectory*

Participants were asked to describe how they became involved with horses. While no single cause or event was identified as a catalyst for involvement with horses, participants followed one of two trajectories: childhood entrance and adult entrance. The first trajectory, childhood entrance, was described by participants who began their involvement as children. Eleven out of 15 participants were childhood entrants.

Participants in this career trajectory began their involvement in one of two ways: through family members' involvement or independently of family members' involvement. This first group became involved with horses by riding, caring for, and spending time around horses owned by other family members, most commonly a parent. Hereafter I will refer to this group as 'family-involved, childhood entrants'. Five out of 11 of the childhood entrants became involved with horses through a family members' involvement.

Sara typified this involvement trajectory and explained how she learned to ride a horse before learning to walk:

My family owns horses so I have pretty much been around them my whole life. My parents did cutting horses when I was real, real little so I've been on horses my whole life. I have a picture of me sitting on my mom's lap in a western saddle when I was like six months old, so I've been riding longer than I've been walking.

Similarly, Emma recounted her childhood fascination with her mother's jumping horse and the role her mother's involvement played in catalyzing her interest:

When I was five we got our first pony. And my mother had a jumping horse, she never showed but she had a jumping horse and I was so enthralled by that and wanted to ride that horse so badly that she got me a pony.

The second type of childhood entrants became involved with horses independently of family members' involvement. Six out of the 11 childhood entrants became involved in this manner. This group of participants became involved with horses

by taking riding lessons at a stable, and each was the only person in their family with an interest in horses. Hereafter I will refer to this group as ‘independently-involved, childhood entrants’. Molly described a typical trajectory for independently-involved, childhood entrants:

I started taking lessons I think in fourth grade, I don't know how old you are in fourth grade. When I started off at a lesson barn, it was a lot different back then because horses, there was more of a tax deduction in the late seventies. So lesson barns used to have, there was just a lot of school horses, it was a lot more prolific, a lot more people rode. So I rode every Saturday for a long time and then I went to summer camp where you'd go for a whole week, which I thought was like unbelievable. And I didn't start riding more than once a week, other than the summer camps, until probably high school. 'Cause I lived far away from the barn I rode at in Illinois, we lived in Algonquin and rode in Woodstock. And then when I went to college I got to ride at least once a day, which totally changed everything for me.

Independently-involved, childhood entrants were, on average, older than the family-involved, childhood entrants were when their involvement commenced and when they acquired their first horse. Although all of the family-involved, childhood entrants owned a horse during their youth, many distinguished owning “their *own* horse” (Kendra) only when they were over seventeen and purchased a horse with their own money (opposed to their parent's) and/or were independently financially responsible for at least a portion of the horse's care. Sara described this notion of financial independence as conferring ownership:

I have been around horses since I could walk basically. My family owns horses so I have pretty much been around them my whole life. But actively owning the horse, only in the last seven or eight years have I owned my own horse. I bought my first horse when I was seventeen and had saved up enough money.

Similarly, Alice highlighted the importance of age in conferring ownership:

Personally, I've owned horses ever since I was allowed to which was when I turned eighteen. But my family has had horses since I was three, so forever. My, two of my brothers and my dad used to ride.

In comparison, the independently-involved, childhood entrants often described owning their own horse at as young an age as five, with no mention made to financial independence or responsibility. Lucy described this notion of age not affecting ownership ability:

My first pony who I've had since I was like eight, did the California circuit for a while. He's a little pony mutt, 12.2 hand pony mutt, he's really cute.

In contrast to the 11 out of 15 childhood entrants, a second involvement trajectory, adult entrance, was described by four participants. These participants were between the ages of 30 and 45 and married. As a group, they began involvement with horses during their twenties, either during or shortly after graduating from college. Hereafter I will refer to this group as 'adult entrants'. Natalie described a typical adult entrant trajectory:

I took some lessons on and off when I was growing up but never real consistently and I took a few in college, toward the end of college when I had a job but I probably really started after college more consistently and I started here at Crazy Creek, I had moved here [to Fort Collins from Arizona] and was getting married and had my, had a job and I was like 'I'm going to do what I want to do,' so I started probably in my mid twenties consistently.

Adult entrants offered two primary reasons for their delayed career entry into the horse world: finances and access. Adult entrants were similar to independently-involved, childhood entrants in that their involvement with horses was independent from family members' interest. However, unlike independently-involved, childhood entrants, adult entrants were typically involved for a shorter time prior to owning their first horse. On average, adult entrants were involved with horses through riding lessons and leasing programs for two years before acquiring their first horse.

Jane described her involvement with horses during college and explained her delayed career entry:

Mainly I learned, I grew up in Wisconsin so there wasn't a big hunter jumper community there, we mainly do trail rides, which I got to do a few times. Never knew growing up anyone who had horses and my grandparents and great grandparents had farms, but horses are just hay-eaters so we never had any. So when I was at CSU I took some riding classes and sort of got my feet wet and I started taking lessons at Crazy Creek a couple years before I got my first horse. Mainly started riding ten years ago, but it was a huge difference once I got my own horse and could ride more than once or twice a week.

Cecelia similarly described her adult entrant career commencement and the financial reasons that restricted prior involvement:

I started riding when I was about twenty-one or twenty-two and was married. I finally had enough money for lessons, so that is when I finally got to learn how to ride. For a while as a child, my parents kept hoping that I would grow out of wanting to ride but they finally got to the point where they knew I wasn't going to grow out of it but then we were too poor to own a horse.

Participants in this study described two commencement trajectories: childhood entrance and adult entrance. The majority of participants were childhood entrants (11 out of 15). Of these, slightly more participants commenced participation independently of family members' participation than did those who commenced participation through family members' participation. A smaller number of participants (4 out of 15) were adult entrants, who despite delayed participation commencement were involved with horses for the shortest amount of time before acquiring their first horse.

## **PERSONAL EFFORT**

Participants in many serious leisure pursuits make significant effort to acquire additional skills, training, or knowledge. To be a hunter/jumper equestrian requires a devotion of significant effort to improve and refine the skills and knowledge of the

pursuit. The basic skills for equestrianism require considerable time to learn and even more time to refine. First, you must learn a skill before you can apply it to different situations. In addition, hunter/jumper equestrianism activities are complex and provide a never-ending opportunity to refine the execution of tasks and dynamic communication process between horse and rider. This complexity and potential for refinement perpetuates a continuously evolving need for skills and knowledge. Participants identified themselves as continuous learners and recognized that riding success, within and outside the competition ring, was heavily influenced by their ongoing desire to learn and improve their riding and equestrian skills. Natalie reflected on the importance learning and refining skills played in competition success:

Dean asked me once, years ago, when I was riding with Susan and we were going through a bad winter and he said, “why do you pay somebody to yell at you?” And I’m like, “I’m paying somebody to make me better” (laughs). But people just don’t think of it like coaching in other sports. It’s never ending, there’s always more to learn, things to improve. That’s part of what’s fun about it, you’re never done learning. And when you’re showing you can really tell who’s been practicing and learning and making an effort and those who aren’t. It all adds up, out there [in the show ring], and fast too.

Significant investments of time, energy, and resources were regularly made by participants to become better equestrians. The most frequent examples included, taking semi-regular lessons (during the show season, on average 1-2 per week plus supervised coaching for one or two days at the show), which ranged in price from \$20 to \$50, depending on the length of time and number of riders in the lesson; and subscribing to educational magazines, such as Practical Horseman or Equus, or reading information online. The less frequent, but highly valued examples included, riding in a clinic, which range in price from \$100 to over \$800, depending on the length of the clinic and the

celebrity of the clinician; taking frequent lessons (2-4 per week); paying a trainer to ride a horse; or attending horse-related events.

Acquiring the skills, knowledge and experience to compete competitively (as opposed to competing purely for fun with no competitive aims), especially in higher levels with more technically difficult courses, requires many years of riding and showing. The participants indicated they had been riding an average of 22.4 years. Furthermore, they owned horses for an average of 15 years. Of this time, participants competed for an average of 17 years, with a minimum of seven years and a maximum of 42 years.

Beyond basic skill mastery, learning and refining advanced skills is increasingly difficult and time consuming. Virtually all participants began riding by taking lessons, closely supervised and structured sessions, ranging from thirty minutes to an hour. Learning and refining the subtleties of advanced riding requires the accumulation of hundreds of individual rides and thousands of hours of experience. The accumulation of these thousands of hours solely through riding in lessons is extremely difficult. Participants unanimously agreed that the desire to ride more and spend more time around horses was a key element in their decision to buy a horse. Many lesson riders spend between one and two hundred hours per year learning and refining their skills, but individuals who own horses spend between five hundred and over several thousand hours per year. This increase in time was consistently viewed as a positive factor, and not a deterrent to participation. Natalie explained how buying (and owning) a horse catalyzed her effort to improve as an equestrian:

I think by owning, it gives you the ability to be around them as much as you want to be around them. With lessons, you're here just a couple times, but when you're an owner you get to bond with them more and, like I said if you have the disease it's hard to stay away.



The complexity of jumping courses, generally, increases in difficulty in higher levels of competition. Most participants expressed the desire to “move up,” referring both to jump height and division difficulty (Molly). In an attempt to create equal competition fields, horse show associations exclude certain groups (e.g., professionals, adults, or horses and/or riders with specific competition history) from entering divisions exclusively for less competitive groups (e.g. amateurs, juniors, young horses, and inexperienced riders). Thus, certain divisions, although having an equal jump height, will be more challenging due to the course design and the skill level of the other competitors. In this way, riders ‘move up’ both horizontally, by increasing the difficulty of the course design and skill level of competitors, as well as vertically, by increasing the height and size of a course’s jumps. ‘Moving up’ typically requires the mastery of new skills and techniques. Premature ‘moving up’ can be unsuccessful at best, and more often, dangerous.

The participants in this study described an almost insatiable desire to advance and improve, which is facilitated by riding at a large boarding facility with riders of many ability levels. The boarding facility setting allows lower level riders to watch and learn from more advanced riders, both during casual riding and in structured lessons. The boarding facility also facilitates riders acquiring knowledge and exposure to a wide range of equestrian skills and management techniques. Participants identified the improvement and learning of new skills as valued goals. Participation in riding lessons, competitions, clinics, as well as developing a social network of horse-friends, are a few ways demonstrated by participants of their significant efforts to become better hunter/jumper equestrians.

## **DURABLE BENEFITS**

Many outcomes of serious leisure pursuits are benefits. These durable benefits are generally agreeable outcomes, anticipated or not, of a person's participation in a leisure pursuit. Stebbins' (2007) posited these benefits to include self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, regeneration or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction and belongingness, and lasting physical products of an activity (e.g., a painting, scientific paper, piece of furniture). In his conception, durable benefits are viewed as distinct from serious leisure rewards, which are the motivational antecedents of pursuing a serious leisure activity (Stebbins 2007). As one of several consequences of pursuing a serious leisure activity, durable benefits may be anything appealing to the participants, whether physical, social, psychological, or something else. Several durable benefits were evident from the interviews and observations of hunter/jumper equestrians, most significantly the regeneration of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, and social interaction.

### *Regeneration of Self*

Stebbins (1992) defined regeneration of self as the capacity of an activity to divert the participants' mind from work or other events and problems in life. Hunter/jumper equestrians discussed two dimensions of regeneration of self: balance in their lives and improved mood.

Participants discussed the dimension of balance in describing the ways horses improved their lives. Horses and the unique social world of 'the barn' setting provided a

positive escape from the stresses of participants' daily lives. Lucy, a college student, explained the balance her horse taught by contrasting it with a less balanced time in her life:

I got really burnt out of riding 'cause I was in a very negative environment in high school and freshman year of college I didn't ride at all and have a horse to go, I had horses but they weren't at school with me when I was in Canada. I kind of got into a negative, depressed, not depressed-depressed, but more a negative destructive path and 'cause more of my time was focused on destructive things. Not like, I wasn't doing drugs or anything but like I was drinking a lot more and partying a lot more 'cause I didn't have the responsibility. And like here, here, it's like I need to get up and go out in the morning and take my horse's blanket off regardless of if I'm hung over or not. So I don't get hung over 'cause I want to go see my horse in the morning. Basically riding just gives me a balance with school that's still positive. And my parents, my parents have a really good agreement with me that I get to keep my horse and keep riding because, as long as I do well in school, because they understand that that is my outlet and my sanity at times. Tiberius has definitely taught me a lot more balance and I've consequently done a lot better in school and worked a lot harder, and 'cause of that I'm a lot happier.

Other participants described balance in a therapeutic manner. This balance served as a countermeasure to the stresses and negative forces in the participants' daily lives. Alice described balance in terms of therapy:

It's kind of like my quiet time. So like if I've had a really stressful day I can come out here and they're kind of like my therapist, so they make me feel better. It's kind of like my happy place.

Horses, and the separate social world in which participants interact with their horses, provided the opportunity for participants to develop and exercise coping mechanisms that enhanced their lives, both within and outside the leisure context. Horses and horse-worlds were a source of stress-relief, which for many equestrians facilitated the development of coping skills and abilities. Horses also enriched equestrians' lives by improving their moods and attitudes.

Cecelia commented on the beneficial effect her horse has on her mood:

It really does help calm me down and put me in a better mood being with my horse, even if it is just to go pet him. I am always a lot happier after I ride.

Erica also explained the role her horse played in improving her mood as “They cheer me up when I’m hysterically crying.”

Other participants described horses as improving their moods or attitudes to a more significant degree. For these participants, horses provided an alternative to pharmaceutical anti-depressants. Patricia described horses as improving her mood similarly to prescription medications:

The only thing that keeps me sane. I definitely can tell when I'm not riding, especially like now 'cause I'm not riding, I'm very irritable and grumpy and need pharmaceutical antidepressants, where I normally have horses that take care of that.

Interaction with horses was described as helping participants’ emotional states, from improving a bad day, to providing comfort, to replacing prescription drugs for depression. Emma even described her horse as providing an alternative to suicide during a depressed time:

Even just going out there will cheer me up a lot. I am on anti-depressants so before that, about I think I started maybe 2 or 3 years ago. I was, it was a last resort, it could be a last resort that I was just so unhappy that I, that it was even really hard for me to not kill myself. He was, I think a real last resort at the time, I didn't have this particular horse. I had a different horse at the time, who I felt really close to. So it helped calm me down.

Horses were seen as enabling participants’ to live fuller lives by providing a source of sanity. Many participants found their horses, and “the barn” setting, to provide an oasis of calm, peacefulness in their otherwise insane lives (Eileen). The time spent with horses, and in ‘the barn’ setting was described as “quiet time,” as a break from ordinary life’s stresses (Alice). For some participants the benefits of sanity found within

‘the barn’ context extended beyond and into their non-leisure life as well. Eileen explained how the clarity she experienced with her horse helped during her teenage years to keep her out of trouble in the non-horse world:

He carried me through some of the most important years of my life. He kept me out of trouble. I would rather spend time with my horses than out partying, drinking, getting involved with boys or drugs. All kinds of things that tend to tempt teenagers. It's very therapeutic.

These descriptions highlight the benefit of regeneration of self that participants gained from horse ownership. Horses were seen as improving participants' mood, mental health, and attitude, both within and outside ‘the barn’ setting.

### *Feelings of Accomplishment*

When describing the benefits of hunter/jumper equestrianism, participants also discussed feelings of accomplishment. These feelings were expressed in regards to learning new skills and from riding a new or difficult horse. Many participants highlighted the accomplishment they felt after learning or successfully performing a skill. Unlike other sports where skills are easily transferred across a range of situations (e.g., hitting a baseball in Fort Collins will be the same as hitting a baseball in Loveland), many horse owners described feelings of accomplishment from performing a task while riding different horses or in different situations (e.g., riding horse X in an arena in Fort Collins will not be the same as riding horse X in an arena in Loveland).

Horses, as independent creatures, were seen as a convoluting variable in learning new skills or successfully performing a known skill. Molly illustrated the confounding variable horses add to the successful performance of a skill:

And even the people who do spend tons of money have to get along with their horses, it's not an automatic thing, like if you pay so much money for a horse then

they will win every time they step in the ring. It's just not like that. Horses have personalities of their own, so if they don't like something about the ring that day, or about you that day they might just decide they don't want to jump a jump they've jumped twenty times before just because.

Molly also discussed how the challenge of performing a known, or already mastered skill, on a difficult horse also leads to feelings of accomplishment:

Because he, well he, while I didn't move up on him necessarily as far as height went, riding him was a real accomplishment for me because I don't, I didn't particularly want to deal with a stallion, one that was um, actually breeding in a breeding program. [Stallions in breeding programs are generally more difficult to ride and handle than geldings or mares and are often avoided by amateur riders].

Additionally, performing known skills on a 'green' or untrained horse was regarded as an accomplishment; particularly when participants were under qualified to perform such skills. Natalie underscored how her inexperience contributed to feelings of accomplishment from successfully riding a green horse:

It was very interesting for me too to work with a baby from the start, I don't know if I would ever do it again just because it is long and time consuming and uh, but it was very much a learning experience. I was telling Andrea yesterday that Neville told me when I started on Sirius that by the time I was good enough to be riding a baby he wouldn't be a baby anymore. So I started, and Neville was very careful with me 'cause I wasn't really at the level to be riding a baby. But it worked out.

These accounts demonstrated the sense of accomplishment felt by participants from successfully performing new skills with different horses in different settings and known skills with difficult or green horses.

As these quotes reveal, horse owners viewed horses as shaping, through their actions and agency, their interactions with the participants. Rather than playing the role of passive objects of humans' sentiments, projections, and constructions of their relations, horses are involved as active subjects in the production of relationships with their owners.

Specifically, it is in what they do, how they act and react in interactions that give meaning to horse owners.

As an outcome of hunter/jumper equestrianism, feelings of accomplishment were an important durable benefit. Learning new skills and performing known skills in various contexts were the most frequent sources of equestrians' feelings of accomplishment. Horses themselves also contributed to feelings of accomplishment, through the relationships and partnerships they formed with humans. These feelings of accomplishment are a beneficial outcome on their own and additionally contribute to a third outcome: enhancement of self-esteem.

#### *Enhancement of Self-Esteem*

For many participants, the accomplishment and success they experienced with their horse partners served to enhance their self-image. Both through the responses of others and through their own internal responses, participants' self-image was enhanced through horse ownership.

Researchers in human animal studies have identified horses' size, and their capacity to be ridden, as empowering in therapeutic settings. The unique opportunity to direct and influence an animal as large as a horse has been described in research as providing a sense of competence and control in therapeutic riding programs (Bizub et al. 2003). Amy identified horses' large size as empowering to her as a small child:

I think one thing as a child that I loved about them was that I was very short, and I could sit on a horse and be taller than everybody. And they are great confidence builders. Great. I mean you could be a small child and you can control a thousand pound animal without, with subtle cues, and stuff that looks like magic and isn't. I mean I think that is part of where that obsession comes from. Is you're taking small people and putting them on, even a pony is a big animal to a small person, a

young kid and you're putting them up on. And you're up above everyone, and just like with all the therapy horses and the kids are in a wheelchair and everyone is always looking down on them and then they get on a horse and they are looking down on everyone. And it's huge. They are amazing creatures.

Some participants described their natural talent for riding as enhancing their self-image. Molly explained the effect her natural ability had on her self-image:

It's one of the few things in my entire life that I was just good at. It wasn't hard for me and all along [my] instructors, would tell my mom wow she's really [good]. Now granted I'm sure they were trying to get her to buy a horse, but my mom made it clear from the get-go that she wasn't going to...[And then] I got moved off the school horses and started riding sale horses, which was when I started falling off regularly. But, I knew, that even being a little kid I knew, that that not everybody did that. And a lot of my friends would take lessons with me and then quit and then a different one would start and then quit...and I just had no desire to not do it, so it's just it's, from that standpoint it's all good. I mean, there's setbacks and I've had confidence setbacks and all that but overall I feel like it's something, if you do something well you should do it as much as possible.

For others, their self-image was enhanced by simply being in the presence of their horse.

Eileen exemplified this notion:

I am truly happiest and perhaps most beautiful when I am at the barn in nothing but jeans and a ponytail enjoying the companionship of my best friend. Horses are very spiritual to me.

These quotes illustrate the empowering, positive benefit horses and horse partnerships provide for participants' self-images. Through their physical size, horses provide a unique opportunity for humans to ride atop their backs; an experience that is empowering both from its physical vantage point, and the sense of control and competence gained from directing their motion.

### *Social Interaction*

Some researchers have identified social interaction as one of the most significant benefits of serious leisure pursuits (Arai and Pedlar 1997; Cuskelly and Harrington



1997). Indeed, one of the most important and frequently mentioned benefits described by equestrians was social interaction and a sense of belonging. Social interaction was described as occurring between other people and between horses.

Participants described a sense of belonging and attachment to other horse owners, horses, and 'horse worlds.' Patricia described her connection to 'horse worlds,' of anything related to horses:

I associate with horse stuff pretty much any way I can, you know hanging out at the barn and horse showing and on the internet, and anyway I can basically.

The social world of horses—as it contained a plethora of subgroups, associations, clubs, and various subcultures—allowed participants to meet and interact with other serious equestrians, and offered participants a starting point for forming meaningful friendships with others who understood their passion. Lucy described the relationship base provided by equestrianism:

I think at least with my group of friends we're there for a common reason and we enjoy riding and love our horses. We want to get better and horse show some but just enjoy the process and enjoy our horses.

Similarly, others described their connection with other owners resulting from sharing similar personality characteristics, an experience they rarely shared with non-owners.

I have other horse owners besides these show girls that I ride with that like to trail ride and have horses up in the canyon and we just have a camaraderie, we have a friendship because of horses but we have a friendship because we're the same type of person, because we love horses. It's just personality, people who don't have horses admire them, but are afraid of them or wish they could afford it but won't ever take that step because they don't want to sacrifice anything. Where when you have a passion for them you put everything else aside. It's a lifestyle. (Emma)

Many participants expressed the benefit of social interaction in terms of camaraderie or a common bond they shared with other likeminded individuals. Cecelia explained the opportunity her boarding stable provided for social interaction:

A lot of times we just hang out in the stable and talk, and spend you know half a day at the stable and I've actually spent you know forty five minutes working with my horse. And the rest of the time I've been talking with my friends.

As Cecelia illustrated, much of the social interaction resulting from hunter/jumper equestrianism occurs between likeminded individuals who share a common passion.

Similarly, Patricia articulated the role a shared passion played in enabling interaction:

I think we all have that common bond so that there's always something to talk about. So you can feel close to somebody fairly quickly 'cause you kind of get into that horse mode and it's pretty easy to form bonds with other horse people I think, 'cause it's like you belong to the same club, like you're tied to each other.

Several participants identified their common passion, or approach to leisure, as facilitating deeper or truer relationships within the horse world than they generally developed outside of it. Jane summarized these deeper relationships in these terms:

And these, and if you're at a boarding facility like I am, they see you in all of your faces; you can't have a mask on all the time. They see your whole personality from triumphs to when things are just terrible. And I think because of that you have much deeper relationships with people. I think you have a whole range of experiences with people that you might not have if you were just, you know you choose to go out with your friends when you are in a good mood, and otherwise you would stay home. Well you just can't do that with a horse. And so people see this in you, with your friends at the stable and you see this in them.

As Jane explained, horse owners often experience a wide range of emotions in the company of other owners. Similarly, Molly described horse ownership as facilitating more 'whole' social relationships:

I think it's more when you are showing. You almost don't have to talk about stuff. When you start showing you know how somebody feels. I mean you can almost feel it for them when they're standing at the gate or whatever it is. It's just a different kind of [connection], I think you share more base emotions because there are times when you almost do get killed and that really takes you down. Or if something really scary happens to you, the only people who are really going to understand that are other horse people 'cause people who aren't horse people will just think you're an idiot for being in that sort of situation in the first place. So stuff like that, I think you just get closer to people because of how close to your heart the horses are, so you just get farther down into people. Where if you get

hurt, or your horses can get hurt, or something happens and you make a mistake, and you're watching one of your friends out there, you're just like 'oohh' 'bastard!' It's just like you're out there, it's hard to fake anything.

As Molly explained, equestrianism facilitated the sharing of a broad and deep range of emotional experiences than typically experienced in non-horse worlds. Participants also identified the unique and multi-dimensional needs of horses as facilitating social interaction. Cecelia described the neediness of horses as facilitating social interaction with other people at her boarding stable:

I think also horses they you know they're so needy that they expand your life a lot. You have to take care of them and it costs a lot of money and it always takes more than one person. You know, if you travel at all then you need people to help take care of them, if your riding isn't going as well as you'd like it to then you get help from people and it really expands you life with friendships with people as well.

Some participants, although acknowledging the potential for deeper relationships with other horse owners than non-owners, differed in their assumption of relateability with other owners. Molly clarified the depth to which a shared passion conferred automatic friendships:

I think you just get closer to people because of how close to your heart the horses are, so you just get farther down into people. I don't just assume that 'cause somebody has horses that I'm going to get along with them, 'cause that's just not the case. You will find lots of people who are like, kindred spirits and you find you have that one thing in common, but you will also find lots of people who aren't. Who have different reasons for being in it, and I think I would say that it becomes fairly obvious fairly quickly, maybe faster than if you just knew them in life, you get to the bottom of people pretty quickly 'cause horses weed out the fluff.

Similarly, Eileen described a passion for horses as the only commonality she assumed she shared with other owners:

I feel connected only through the horses. You all have a huge financial responsibility so we all complain about how much something costs. Or the huge responsibility of this powerful but delicate animal. Your horse is something that is sacred to you. It's like a single mom in high school. It's something that not a lot of

people around me have. And can't relate to...non-horse owners like that you have a horse. And they all want to come ride, but they don't realize it's not something you put a penny in. Horses aren't like cars, or skis that you get to whenever your schedule is free. Like I said, being a horse owner is like being a single mom in high school, people like babies but not many people really understand what that relationship actually entails.

In addition to immediate social groups, these participants identified themselves with the wider community of horse-lovers, as one participant termed "through their common bond" (Jane). Patricia explained the social effect of this shared bond:

I think we all have that common bond so that there's always something to talk about. So you can feel close to somebody fairly quickly 'cause you kind of get into that horse mode and it's pretty easy to form bond with other horse people I think, 'cause it's like you belong to the same club, like you're tied to each other.

As members of a socially marginal avocation, finding the opportunity to interact with other like-minded individuals was important to participants. Meghan explained the benefit of belonging to 'horse world' associations:

They give me something to be passionate about, and to care about and care for. They have become my children and I treat them as such. They give me companionship and comfort as well. They give me something to "belong" to, such as associations and clubs, and the opportunity to meet people who have the same interests as I do.

These results demonstrate the beneficial outcome of social interaction experienced by horse owners. For many, the relationships they developed with fellow boarders and horse owners were an opportunity to belong to a group or club of likeminded people in a passion that non-owners did not share or understand. In these horse worlds, participants escaped their normal experience as outsiders to non-owners and were able to exist with the oasis of 'horse worlds.'

What these quotes illustrate is that horse owners derived several durable benefits from their participation in hunter/jumper equestrianism. Most notably, participants

described the regeneration of self; feelings of accomplishment; enhancement of self-image; and social interaction as some of the most important outcomes of equestrianism, with the additional outcome of developing and maintaining a relationship with their horse (as discussed in Chapter 4). Participants described these benefits as enhancing and facilitating the satisfaction they derived from equestrianism. In this way, participants described these four benefits and the relational benefit (discussed in Chapter 4) as counterbalancing the costs (discussed in Chapter 6) of the pursuit.

## **UNIQUE ETHOS**

Professionals and amateurs/publics contribute to the unique ethos of hunter/jumper equestrianism. Stebbins (1992) noted that serious leisure pursuits are conducive to the development of a broad subculture, which is manifest in the “group’s special beliefs, norms, events, values, traditions, moral principles and performance standards” (p.7). The subsequent development of the subculture or social world is built largely from the unique ethos. Subculture, in this conception, is derived from Fine and Kleinman’s (1979) definition as “a set of understandings, behaviors, artifacts used by particular groups and diffused through interlocking group networks” (p.18). This basis of subculture is used to explain the widespread occurrence of cultural elements in populations, the existence of local variation in subcultures and continual change in subcultures (Yoder 1995).

When responding to questions about identity and the positive and negative aspects of owning a horse, participants often described similar attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Using narratives to illustrate particular ideas, participants often highlighted common

practices. As a group, horse owners are diverse, with a wide variety of disciplines, stabling environments, competition involvement, and management philosophies. The ethos described in this research is not intended to refer to all horse owners; rather, it describes the ethos of serious hunter/jumper equestrianism, among one subgroup of horse owners—hunter/jumper equestrians—although it may have many similarities to other serious equestrian pursuits, such as dressage or eventing.

As a unique avocation, the testimony of horse owners revealed several common attitudes. One fundamental attitude shared by participants was a self-referential typology of ‘good owners’ that they used to highlight or contrast with behaviors or attitudes of a theoretical group of ‘bad owners.’ This attitude was always presented as a comparison of a given trait in a theoretical group of ‘bad owners’ who negatively exhibited this trait to a self-referential group of ‘good owners’ who positively exhibited the given trait. This comparison was always structured by comparing themselves, the participant, to a theoretical group of ‘bad owners.’ Jane described her ownership philosophy to a referential group of bad owners:

I don't have any plans of selling Barty unless he is evil towards me. And with my mare that I had, I would have never sold her. I think she was definitely more like a dog, where we had a closer bond, but I also had her for six years. I don't know what Barty's and my relationship will develop into. I think that is unique among horse owners, ‘cause a lot of people will buy a horse as an investment and then train them and then sell them and that's not my thing. But they're big dogs. But some people who have dogs get rid of them too. That's why I say I'm a bad horse owner, I mean I think I'm a good horse owner, [I think I'm] unique. I know somebody who has had ten horses in the time that I've had two, and I've only had two ‘cause one of them died.

The range of traits participants ascribed to bad owners was overlapping and contradictory and included a virtually limitless range of behavior. For instance, owners who viewed horses as large pets were described as positive by some participants (Jane)

and negative by others (Lee). Alternatively, owners who viewed horses as utilitarian recreation objects were described as negative by some (Jane, Sara) but these same owners described owning horses for utilitarian recreational purposes. The ambiguous and contradictory traits ascribed to 'good' and 'bad' owners were used to create and reinforce participants' identity narrative. This conceptual grey area was used by participants to situationally define their behavior and attitudes as 'good' while simultaneously reinforcing their positive identity narrative. The practice of evaluating 'good' versus 'bad' owners appeared to be fueled in part by the belief expressed by many participants, of the uniqueness of their horse or situation, and the corresponding attitude that others would not experience their degree of success with their horse or situation. Often discussed in terms of the superiority of their particular style, knowledge, or experience, participants frequently used good versus bad owner comparisons to highlight their horses' uniqueness and their superior ownership style. The 'bad' owner referred to by Jane, in the previous description, used a good versus bad owner comparison to define her own behavior as superior:

I think I'm a pretty good owner, depending on what type of circle you're in. In terms of the show world, I think I'm pretty typical. In terms of the back yard people probably not 'cause they think of them more as pets and members of the family so more like a dog. So depending on the circle you're in, I think I'm pretty good for show people. (Lee)

These testimonies demonstrate the attitude expressed by participants of the superiority of their ownership style and the frequent use of good versus bad comparisons to reinforce their identity narrative. In using these comparisons, participants created "identity narratives" through which they shaped the meaning of their experiences and provided "virtual paradigms of experience" to which participants turned and also shaped

to make sense of their lives and selves (Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Shipway and Jones 2008). Participants also practiced the use of ‘what if’ or ‘what could have been’ stories when discussing past events.

Storytelling and reliving past triumphs and failures were key features in the testimonies of participants. Retelling events allowed participants to edit out unflattering details or to selectively focus on features of stories they themselves defined as positive and congruent with their identity narrative. Storytelling served two purposes in the testimony of participants. First, it established the credentials of individuals within the group. Second, it served to reinforce the individual’s sense of identity (Shipway and Jones 2008).

A common use of storytelling was in participants’ descriptions of experiences as at horse shows. I observed several participants describe their participation in a horse show in the following terms: “The show went great! We got two second places.” However, what participants would often edit was the number of competitors they competed against, downplaying the significance of unflattering details. Thus, a less edited retelling of the previous story might actually be restated as, “The show went adequately. Including myself, there were two competitors in each class and we placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in two classes. So out of the two competitors we were not judged to be the superior performers.” Through selectively focusing on positive features, participants shaped their own and others’ interpretation of their horse owner identity. Similarly, participants often used storytelling to situationally define success.



Storytelling was often combined with the common practice of riding and owning horses participants were unqualified to ride; and used to situationally define success. Jane described this practice:

Bella was my first horse, so she sort of ended up being the ideal. She wasn't necessarily the ideal in the respect that she had more athleticism than I had riding ability, so that's one of the reasons I board her is when I can't work with them my trainer works with them. As an inexperienced rider that makes things difficult at times.

However, Jane illustrated the subjective and situational nature of defining success. By predicating her 'un-success' or 'limited failure' (an injury requiring multi-day hospitalization that resulted from Jane falling off and subsequently getting kicked in the head when her horse bucked) with her inexperience as a rider and her horse's tendency, or enjoyment, of bucking, she described her sense of accomplishment:

She liked to buck when I was on her. She was always pretty careful with me. And only once I came off because of her [as opposed to falling off because of a rider error], she bucked me off.

As this quote demonstrates, feelings of accomplishment were derived from subjective and situational definitions of success. Using her under-qualification as justification for her 'limited failures,' Jane used Jones's (2000) concept of 'voice' to reframe her experiences in a positive manner by selectively focusing on aspects that she identified as positive (i.e., falling off once). Combined with the norm of storytelling, this strategy appeared to be a key element utilized to protect participants' identities, so that performances not congruent with the identity portrayed did not affect the salient identity (Shipway and Jones 2008). Using voice, participants edited and contextualized events when telling stories to create and support their created identity.

Language is an integral component of the unique ethos of hunter/jumper equestrianism. Many words, terms, and phrases are used exclusively in this subculture. This is particularly evident in participants' conversion of words, or word coining. The most frequently used form of word conversion is deriving verbs from nouns and nouns from verbs. The verb 'lessoning' derived from the noun lesson, is used as shorthand for 'to take a lesson,' whereby the phrase 'I am lessoning tomorrow' uses the future tense, or 'I lessoned yesterday' uses the past tense. Other commonly derived verbs include 'trailer,' from the noun trailer or 'flating,' from the adjective flat, i.e. ride on the flat, versus ride over fences.

Technical jargon, which conveys specific insider information and often refers to equipment, supplies, and procedures, is also frequently used. A trainer advising her rider before a competition stated "Now remember, this is table 2-2c, that's power and speed, so don't forget after jump eight you've really got to dial it up a notch" communicates more than the type of class and desired riding technique for the rider. It also communicates that both the rider and trainer are a part of a specific social world, in which such phrases were understood and appreciated.

The use of word conversion and technical jargon contribute to the maintenance of the social world. In addition to common jargon, these horse owners also describe similar values. The most prominent of these values revolved around independence and hard work. Emma explained the value she placed on hard work and self-reliance:

I think I'm not as typical because I don't just board them and have somebody else do the work. I do the work. Even when I board them, I still do the work. But as far as loving them, caring for them, raising them I'm probably as typical as any other horse person that raises horses. I'm not typical as the ones that just show. Cause I don't have the endless funds to do it at the high class level, where someone is taking care of it all for you. I groom, I clean stalls, I do the whole thing. I mean I

enjoy it, I enjoy all those parts of it, I don't think there was a time when I had somebody who was actually helping me tack up my horse that I didn't re-do it, or double check it or you know because it's not that I'm so particular it's that I just know what works, you know the horse is comfortable, I'm comfortable.

Other participants expressed the value of hard work as helping to level the competition field that is unbalanced by monetary expenditures:

The financial distinction between you and the people that have money, at horse shows, it's hard to not notice. But, I wouldn't say it bothers me, but it's apparent and I know I'm doing really well with what I have to work with. If I had that much money to spend, but the fact remains I don't, they do so it's not an entirely fair sport, it really isn't. Somebody can stack the deck against you, that doesn't take away from the other reasons why I like it, doesn't make me any less good but if you want to compete in it that's something that you face. And if you can't deal with it you probably shouldn't show 'cause it's always going to be that way. So that the difference, or the space between the haves and the have not's is huge, and it's very obvious. If you're a good rider and you do well and you ride well you will still get recognition for that and you will still in the end, you will still do pretty well despite the fact that you are not spending billions of dollars. And even the people who do spend tons of money have to get along with their horses, it's not an automatic thing. (Molly)

The value of hard work was used as a justification for the all-consuming nature of involvement with serious horse ownership. Many participants described horses as “taking all their time” or, when discussing the benefits of ownership, offer “you won't have time for anything else.” Participants believed the all-consuming nature of serious horse ownership was a positive aspect to their involvement.

As a distinctive social world arranged around a common passion for horses, the ethos of serious hunter/jumper equestrianism was characterized by subculture values, practices, beliefs, and attitudes; and structural level features, including social networks and characteristic lifestyles. Many participants reported membership in several regional and national clubs and associations. In addition, many reported using media, particularly

the internet, to keep in contact with news, show results, point standings, and competition schedules.

Unruh (1980) proposed that many social worlds are characterized by mediated communication: using television, radio, newsletters, and the like to convey information. Building on this, Stebbins (1999) predicted that contact via the internet would increasingly become more prevalent by devotees of serious leisure activities. All the participants in this study reported using the internet for a wide range of horse-related tasks, including buying and selling horses, tack, equipment, and vehicles; participating in online discussion groups; scheduling horse-related trips; and meeting and maintaining horse friendships.

The testimony of these participants highlights the unique ethos that emerges from serious hunter/jumper equestrianism. As a unique social world, hunter/jumper equestrianism demonstrate the common practice of storytelling, including ‘what could have been’ stories as well as good versus bad owner comparisons. Owners provided further evidence of a shared ethos in the attitudes, beliefs, and values they expressed. Insider knowledge of this horse world ethos allowed participants access not only into the social world, but it also enabled them to take part in the collective activity, that of riding, which is an integral part of the social world. In turn, this reinforces the sense of community built around membership in the social world, and as it relates to identification, the sixth characteristic of serious leisure.

## **IDENTIFICATION**

The literature on serious leisure posits that as an activity formed around a central life interest, participants tend to identify with their chosen pursuit (Stebbins 1992). Participants constructed a significant portion of their identities around their passion for horses. At the most surface level, this identification could be seen in the clothes and accessories participants wore and decorated their homes, office spaces, and vehicles with pictures, art, souvenirs, awards, horse related themes, sayings, and logos. Some even had jewelry constructed from images of their horses. In a visit to one participant's home, I observed the following:

The welcome mat had a horse running across an open field; upon entering the front hallway dozens of photos of the participant's horses lined the walls; the full length of the staircase leading to the second floor was lined with year-end award coolers spanning a range of over twenty years. Entering the living/dining room, there was virtually no space not touched by horse paraphernalia: the couch had horse themed pillows, and draped across the back was a tapestry with four-foot tall images of horses. The walls, tables, and even windows displayed photographs of the participant and her three children riding. Halters and bridles hung from exposed structural beams, along with year-end award ribbons won by both herself and her daughter. Even the floor was partially covered with a horse-themed rug.

The homes of several other participants were decorated similarly; displaying the most notable and prestigious awards in the public parts of the house, and gradually displaying the more minor pieces towards the private parts of the house. However, clothing and other decoration and paraphernalia were only the surface measure of the degree to which participants identities were tied to horses.

When discussing how their love for horses evolved, participants unanimously believed it was a trait they were born with. None could remember a time before their passion began, nor could any identify a catalyst to their interest.

When asked if she had a certain identity because she owned horses, Cecelia exemplified this notion in these terms:

That's like asking do you have a certain identity because you're schizophrenic. I really never chose to like horses. I was born that way and all my life I wanted a horse so badly. For a while my parents were like "oh she'll grow out of it and if she would just stop talking about the horses while we drive by." Then they finally got to the point where they knew I wasn't going to grow out of it, but then we were too poor to own a horse. I never choose to be this way, it was never a choice, and I don't know if that's identity or not. I think it must be just like being female is part of my identity or being American and having grown up in this culture is part of my identity. So I guess the answer must be yes. I mean there's certainly no possibility of me not being a horse [person]. Even if I didn't own a horse, I would still be a person who wanted to own a horse.

Beyond the belief that a love for horses was a genetically determined quality, it was also viewed as an immutable, unchanging characteristic. Although the opportunity to own a horse was structured by several factors, such as access, financial resources, and availability of discretionary time, participants described their interest in horses preceding any actual interaction with horses. Molly articulated the unchanging nature of her passion:

People when you have this in you, you just you do and if you don't you don't and you can't manufacture it you can't make somebody want to, it's like they were born and they always wanted to ride or they don't. And people who start [and] aren't in it because they just were born loving horses, it just doesn't go well.

When asked to describe any influence equestrianism played in their identity most described it as the primary, or one of the primary, influences. Participants used the phrases "horse lady," "horse person," and "horse crazy" to describe themselves. These labels were applied both self-referentially and to describe how others view their involvement.

Amy discussed the way “horse lady” was used by non-horse people when describing her:

You're the horse lady, I hear that a lot, especially with people who aren't in the horse field. Or other friends it's always horse-lady. I'm definitely connected, reminded.

For others, the application of a “horse” label was both internally and externally applied.

Sara explained her “horse-girl” label in these terms:

It's definitely a part of their identity; you know my whole family knows me as the horse-girl. It's like I've always been that same person ever since I was little. I mean that's why I'm going to college is so I can do horse stuff the rest of my life. So if that's not an identity-thing I don't know what is.

As Sara explained, equestrianism was a central life interest, spanning the entirety of her life. The majority of participants organized and centered their lives around horses.

Many based the full range of decisions, from the smallest to most significant, on their pursuit. Molly described the extent to which horses have impacted her life:

It's definitely made an imprint on my life and where I've gone to college, why I moved to California, Missouri and then Colorado, who I've met, both friends and my ex-husband, It's certainly affected every aspect of my life. It's certainly impacted who I am because a lot of my decisions were based on the fact that I needed to still be able to ride and take care of horses. When you spend so much time doing something that you love, it becomes part of who you are. Somebody said one time to me that Regulus [her horse] is like a virus, ‘cause he’s always with you. In some ways I think that’s true, not in the bad way a virus makes you sick, but yes in the way that he’s been a part of my life for so long he’s like a part of me. I just can’t imagine him not being here.

Gibson et al. (2002) postulated that “with the growing complexity and fragmentation of the modern [Simmel 1955], and now post-modern society [Dunning 1999], the social worlds and opportunities for collective identity inherent in sport raise it to a higher level of social importance” (p.397). In their testimony, these participants identified with equestrianism, both as individuals and with a larger social group. Dunning (1999) suggested identification with a sport can “provide people with an important

identity-prop; a source of 'we-feelings' and a sense of belonging in what otherwise would be an isolated existence" (p.6). Serious hunter/jumper equestrians identified as both participants and members of the broader social group. Many provided descriptions supporting Dunning's (1999) proposition that 'we-feelings' offer important support for individual identity. Molly described how the importance of equestrianism was poorly understood by non-owners:

It has certainly made a distinct impression on my personal life, but eventually I don't believe that something that is positive and a part of me, and that is real, it's not something that can change. I certainly would be richer and have a lot more stuff if I didn't ride, but I don't really care. I figure that the people that resent the time that I spend doing it, that's their problem. But with your friends, [especially] non-horse friends, it definitely gets rid of the ones that aren't really there for you. Like my brother, for example, will walk into the barn and just [looks] around and is like 'I just don't get this, I don't get this, I don't understand.' And a lot of people are like that. But if they can, they're really your friend, if they can understand that it means something to you, that it's part of you. My parents aren't particularly in love with horses, but they know how much it means to me and have always encouraged me. Despite the fact that they were never going to buy me a horse. they made that very clear from the start, 'cause they thought I wasn't going to stick with it, by the way. Yeah, so they just they wanted me to swim or play tennis, um, no and no. And I don't know if that's really a negative about horses, but it's definitely the impact that it's had on me, financial and personal. But in hindsight do I think the personal part is negative, no.

As these quotes illustrate, horse owners constructed their identities to a significant degree around their passion for horses. The terms "horse-person" and "horse-lady" were both self- and externally applied to describe participants' identities. As a central life interest, participants structured their lives around hunter/jumper equestrianism, including job choices, college selection, and nation or regional relocations. Identity also connected participants to a broader community through their common bond. The testimony of these participants offers insight into the role of leisure in providing an important sense of



meaning and belonging through an interest, which in the non-horse world can be alien and isolating to serious hunter/jumper equestrians.

In the previous chapter, I described hunter/jumper equestrianism as consistent with Stebbins' (2007) structural definition of serious leisure, specifically as an amateur pursuit. In this chapter, I presented evidence showing that equestrianism meets Stebbins' (2007) definition of serious leisure at a social-psychological level. The relationships developed between humans and horses have been shown to be a fundamental aspect of the pursuit. In addition, the complex relationship between the serious approach to equestrianism and the pursuit's dual species connection is essential to the development and maintenance of the unique ethos of the pursuit. In the next chapter, I will explore some of the costs of the of humans' relationships with their horses and their serious approach to hunter/jumper equestrianism.

## **CHAPTER SIX SERIOUS LEISURE COSTS**

As a pursuit, equestrianism is on the margins of both human-animal activities—which are dominated by dogs and cats—and serious leisure—which is dominated by human-only and individual activities. As such, exploring the costs of equestrianism provides insight into dimensions of human-animal activities and serious leisure in an area previously unexplored. Serious leisure pursuits are characterized by the ‘serious,’ significant, and meaningful approach adopted by its participants in their involvement, commitment, and identification with the pursuit. Likewise, (as discussed in Chapter 4) horse owners characterize their relationships with horses as emotional, reciprocating, and based on intersubjectivity. The consequences of participating in a serious leisure pursuit involving a minded, co-actor of a different species are not all positive.

The rewards of serious leisure and human-animal activities have received the majority of attention in research, and little attention has been focused on the costs. Stebbins (2007) acknowledged this lack of attention “has left a gap in our understanding that must be filled” (p.15). Stebbins’ (2007) posited three basic types of serious leisure costs: disappointments, dislikes and tensions, and no such model has been suggested in human-animal studies. However, this model fails to recognize the ‘serious’ costs described by participants that go beyond disappointments, dislikes, and tensions.

Equestrianism provides a unique context in which to investigate the costs of serious leisure. The organizational model proposed by Stebbins (2007) is insufficient to

fully explain this pursuit because it lacks two important components. First, it lacks an analysis and understanding of the depth, variety, and ‘seriousness’ of the costs endured by serious leisure participants. Second, it fails to acknowledge the role of costs in the creation of a pursuit’s unique ethos and in the contribution to the group’s sense of cohesion. A new model is necessary to fully explain the types and degrees of serious leisure costs, as well as the effect of costs on a pursuit’s ethos and sense of group cohesion.

Thus, I propose the following new model to explain the types, degrees, and affects of serious leisure cost, based on the testimony of horse owners in this study. Serious hunter/jumper equestrianism involves two categories of cost: primary and secondary. Primary costs are those that are fundamentally required for participation in a pursuit and that are deliberate and intentional. For hunter/jumper equestrianism, primary costs are of two types: monetary and time costs. In contrast, secondary costs are those which are not required by participation, and which are unexpected and inadvertent. Secondary costs of equestrianism are of three types: physical, emotional, and social. The distinction between primary and secondary costs is the fundamental necessity of the cost, in some degree, for participation. For example, all horse owners must have some degree of monetary cost that is required to participate in hunter/jumper equestrianism (i.e., board, vet, farrier fees). In contrast, although horse owners may anticipate some degree of secondary costs (i.e., physical injury) from hunter/jumper equestrianism, costs of this type are not a prerequisite for involvement. Additionally, the experience of primary and secondary costs was described by the horse owners in this study as providing a source of pride and ‘badges of honor,’ which as a form of social capital enhanced individual’s status and

contributed to the group's overall sense of cohesion and creation of a unique ethos in the pursuit. However, despite participants' contextualizing and justifying the costs of equestrianism as outweighed by the pursuit's positive features, costs did constrain, dilute, and reduce the satisfaction horse owners derived from participation in hunter/jumper equestrianism.

## **PRIMARY COSTS**

Most serious leisure pursuits include basic costs required by participation, such as competition entry fees, equipment costs, and the like. In the new model of serious leisure costs, I propose these costs are "primary costs," which are essential or requisite for participation in a serious leisure pursuit. The two types of primary cost in hunter/jumper equestrianism are monetary and time costs. Monetary cost varied in the amount and significance relative to each participants' income. Time costs varied in the amount spent, both weekly and cumulatively, and in the significance relative to each participant's availability of leisure time.

### *Monetary Cost*

The monetary cost of participation in hunter/jumper equestrianism was cited most frequently by participants as the largest constraint to their involvement. In measuring the degree of monetary cost, only the cost of board was considered due to the scope of this project. Although there is variation in the costs of farriers and veterinarians, over a one-year period the differences paid by participants accounted for less than one third (without major injury or sickness) the amount paid for board. Due to the scope of this project

analysis on non-board essential costs, such as optional tack, equipment, clothing, feed and supplements, and non-routine veterinary and farrier visits was not attempted, although this also would be an interesting topic for future study.

In terms of the cost of boarding a horse, participants either kept their horses at a boarding facility (11), owned a boarding facility where their horses were kept (3), or kept their horses at home and at a boarding facility (1). The three participants who owned boarding facilities were professional-trainers, who made a living from teaching riding. They were not included in this comparison because they did not pay a direct rate to board their horses, and their monetary costs were not purely for serious leisure purposes, but instead were necessary for their occupation. Thus, only the twelve participants who did not own a boarding facility were considered in the amount and significance of monetary cost.

Boarding facilities ranged in monthly board rates, per horse, from \$275-\$425. Of the 12 participants who boarded their horses, two paid a monthly rate of \$275, two paid a monthly rate of \$300, seven paid a monthly rate of \$325 and one paid a monthly rate of \$425. Four participants boarded more than one horse, which increased their monetary cost. Two participants boarded two horses at a monthly rate of \$300, for a monthly cost of \$600; one participant boarded two horses at a monthly rate of \$325, for a monthly cost of \$650; and one boarded three horses at a monthly rate of \$325, for a monthly cost of \$975.

In terms of annual monetary cost, two had an annual cost of \$3300, five had an annual cost of \$3900, one had an annual cost of \$5700, two had an annual cost of \$7200, two had an annual cost of \$7800 and one had an annual cost of \$11,700. The significance

of this cost relative to participants' income ranged between 3.4 and 36 percent. Jane had the smallest annual monetary cost relative to her total income, while Meghan and Eileen had the largest cost relative to their incomes. All participants had monetary costs as horse owners. However, the amount of money spent by each participant does not represent an equal sacrifice. For the participant with the highest income, the amount of money she spent on her horse was 3.4 percent of her total income, or one tenth the relative cost paid by Meghan and Eileen, who each spent 36 percent of their annual income on board. Although all participants paid a minimum of \$3300 in board annually to own horses, all participants do not equally experience these costs as a sacrifice.

In spite of participants' different monetary costs, participants unanimously described monetary costs as the most significant constraint to involvement in equestrianism. Emma explained monetary cost as the primary negative consequence of equestrianism "Well it's expensive, that's probably the biggest negative."

Others explained monetary cost in terms of an opportunity cost, or what Buchanan (1969) as the cost related to the next-best available option. Some described the monetary cost of equestrianism as something concrete they went without. Cecelia described the loss of an unrealized vacation as the monetary cost of equestrianism each month:

They're very expensive. So there's a lot of things I can't do that I could do if I had that extra money, and sometimes it can be as much as seven hundred a month if it is a month where I have vetting, shoeing and board, it can easily be seven hundred a month. Well I can buy a round trip ticket to Hawaii for seven hundred dollars, so there are a lot of things because of the expense.

As this quote highlighted, Cecelia compared her monthly cost to something concrete that she went without: a plane ticket to Hawaii.

Other participants described their costs in terms of added work:

It's very expensive. I've had to sacrifice a lot to have him. Working extra to pay for board and shoes. (Eileen)

As these quotes illustrate, the monetary cost of equestrianism was described as one of the most significant constraints to involvement in hunter/jumper equestrianism. To pay the costs of equestrianism, participants utilized two strategies: reducing other expenses and increasing their amount of income.

Several participants discussed the perception outside equestrianism that horse owners did not need to utilize either of these financial budgeting strategies because their income was sufficiently high to cover the costs. Alice explained the perception that all horse owners have an above average income in these terms:

I think it um, in our society now everyone thinks that just because you own a horse you have a higher social status because they think you have more money. But we don't have more money, we just don't have any money for anything else.

Despite the existence of a substantial fraction (34%) of horse owners nationwide with a household income below \$35,000 (the national median income for women in 2007 was \$35,102 and \$45,113 for men), the perception that horse owners have a higher income than all households or households with other pets, may stem from the factual reality behind that belief (AVMA 2007). In 2007, more horse owners (26%) than dog (23%) or cat (21%) owners had median incomes over \$85,000, and more pet owners (23%) compared to all U.S. households (21%) earned over \$85,000. However, in a survey conducted by the United States Equestrian Federation (2008) of its 85,000 members, researchers found members had an average income of \$185,000, and nearly half have an annual income over \$100,000.

Other participants discussed the monetary distinction within equestrianism between individuals with disparate income levels as pronounced in competitive horse show settings. Molly described the distinction of horse owners utilizing budgeting strategies for participation in equestrianism and those who do not:

The financial distinction between you and the people that have money, at horse shows, it's hard to not notice. But, I wouldn't say it bothers me, but it's apparent. I know I'm doing really well with what I have to work with, if I had that much money to spend, but the fact remains I don't, they do, so it's not an entirely fair sport, it really isn't. So that the difference, or the space between the haves and the have not's is huge, and it's very obvious.

As these participants explained the monetary cost of equestrianism, they identified participants as in two marginal positions: outside and within the pursuit. Outside equestrianism, participants were in a marginal position due to the perception of an above average income and within the pursuit, participants were in a marginal position due to their lower than average income. Yet, for the 34% of equestrians with an annual income below the national median (\$35,000) and below the average for horse owners involved in competition (\$100,000), they were in a marginal position due to their income, despite representing nearly one third of all horse owners.

Monetary costs are requisite for participation in equestrianism. However, the sacrifices participants made were not experienced equally. Additionally, the monetary costs of equestrianism marginalized participants in two ways. Outside the pursuit, equestrians were assumed to have a higher than average income, and within the pursuit participants were in a marginal position due to their lower than average income. Thus, the monetary costs of equestrianism had ramifications that were exclusively financial, and due to their marginal financial position, effects that were social-psychological as well.



### *Time Cost*

Participants also experienced primary, requisite costs of hunter/jumper equestrianism in terms of time. The amount of time spent by participants varied based on where their horse was kept and the amount of time spent on non-essential care. Based on my own experiences and observations, I have estimated the typical amount of time required for various horse related activities. The first of these is the time required for necessary daily basic care. Stalls, for instance, require cleaning daily if the horse spends a significant amount of time inside, and this takes about five minutes a day. For comparison, a field or pasture would require cleaning or manure spreading less frequently, depending on size, on average of 1-2 times per year. Owners providing essential basic daily care can be safely assumed to spend a minimum of ten minutes per day providing food and water to under six horses, not requiring stall cleaning. In total, a horse owner might expect to spend 10-20 minutes a day for the care of two horses.

Although the three participants who provided essential basic daily care had an additional time sacrifice, most participants who kept their horses at a boarding facility spent the same amount of time or more time commuting to and from the boarding facility each day (the average commute time was fifteen minutes in each direction, the shortest was five minutes and the longest forty minutes). However, participants who boarded their horses were not required to care for their horses every day, as someone else provided their essential basic care. For these eleven participants all the time they sacrificed to spend with their horses was non-essential and voluntary. Although none of the participants went more than a week at a time without visiting their horses, with the essential daily care provided for them, any of the participants could have gone weeks or months without spending time with their horse.

Beyond essential daily care, which was provided by only three participants, time costs of equestrianism can be divided into riding- and non-riding activities. Riding activities would include locating and securing the horse (either from a pasture, paddock or stall), cleaning and brushing the horse, tacking, traveling to riding location, riding, returning from riding location, un-tacking, cleaning and brushing the horse, and returning the horse to his or her housing location. The time costs spent by participants in this study varied in amounts, but on average participants spent between 25-35 percent of their total horse-time on riding activities. The lowest time spent on riding-activities was three to four hours per week, while the largest amount of time spent was 25-30 hours per week.

Non-riding activities would include: cleaning tack and equipment, preparing to go to a horse show, feeding, grazing or turning a horse out in paddock. Proportionally, participants spent between 65-75 percent of their total horse time on non-riding activities. The lowest non-riding time activity time was six to seven hours per week, while the highest time spent was 55-65 hours per week.

In terms of time costs, participants distinguished between essential and non-essential daily care. Emma highlighted the larger proportion of her total-horse time spent on essential care and non-riding activities than on riding activities, in this way:

I mean obviously when you keep your own at home you have to feed them, clean stalls and do that twice a day, but riding when I'm in the show season time period I would say I ride at least five days a week, sometimes seven. In addition to riding and taking care of them. Everything. Well if you said it was an hour a day just for feeding, times seven. That's one issue, but to ride you spend a couple hours getting them ready and putting them away, times five, so I would say maybe 20, probably a good guesstimate.

Although the majority of time costs were requisite for participation in equestrianism, participants also experienced unexpected time costs that were required

when horses became sick, injured, or required non-routine care. These time costs were unique to equestrianism as a human-animal activity, involving a second living “personlike” agent. This second type of time costs can be seen as relational-, rather than leisure-based and would likely be found in other forms of human-animal activities that involve an on-going dual species relationship. Relational time costs were described by participants as requisite to the pursuit. Ignoring or not caring for a horse was not discussed by participants as a moral or optional method. Natalie explained the relational costs in equestrianism:

You can't, especially when you own one, you can't just go and forget them for a month. You have to commit. There's a commitment you can't put them on the bookshelf and say oh I'm going to come back when I have the time. It's more [than a book], I mean they're a living creature; it's not like a baseball glove that you can leave for a couple months and then come back to. Horses need time and that's good.

Similarly, Lucy explained the relational costs as a responsibility of horse ownership:

I need to get up and go out in the morning and take my horse's blanket off regardless of if I'm hung over or not. So I don't get hung over 'cause I need to go take care of my horse in the morning. It's my responsibility as a horse owner to take care of him.

As these participants discussed, relational time costs were necessary for the care of another living creature with whom they pursued leisure activities. However, the relational costs, although necessary, were not universally regarded as a negative consequence. Jane discussed the way her commitment to providing for her horse's relational costs helped her cope with the death of her dog:

And then when Bella was recovering with three months of stall rest, my dog died during that portion, so it was one of those things where I had to go take care of Bella, 'cause I couldn't deal with her dying 'cause I neglected her so that was actually very helpful in getting past Snickers dying 'cause otherwise I probably wouldn't have gotten out of bed. I knew she was counting on me to get her out and to take care of her and I couldn't neglect her after Snickers just dying so I

forced myself to go out and take care of her so I guess in some ways I relied on her too.

Time costs are a requisite component of equestrianism. However, equestrianism requires a type of time cost unique to human-animal activities: relational costs, which were necessary for the non-routine care of another living “personlike” agent. Although time costs are essential for participation in many kinds of leisure pursuits, the relational costs of equestrianism would likely be higher than other human-animal activities with pets that share humans’ living space. Horses’ size prohibits (almost) all owners from sharing their living space. However, the physical separation of humans and horses necessitates an intentional expenditure of time by humans to provide the relational costs required to sustain their leisure partners.

## **SECONDARY COSTS**

In contrast to the two types of primary cost, monetary and time, which were intentional and deliberate, participants’ also experienced secondary costs that were unexpected and inadvertent. There are three types of secondary cost in the new model I propose for serious leisure cost: physical, emotional, and social. While specific costs in these types were sometimes unexpected, horse owners voluntarily participated knowing that each could occur. Each of these types has three degrees: mild, moderate, and serious. For each type, all participants experienced the mild degree of cost, while the smallest number experienced the serious level. Moderate and serious sacrifices were most common for the emotional dimension and least common for the social dimension.

### *Physical Cost*

Existing research on physical injury from horse sports provides a framework for understanding ‘typical’ physical sacrifices of hunter/jumper equestrians. Two methodological issues limit the ability to generalize from some physical injury research. First, a large body of research focuses on pediatric and youth injuries, rather than on equestrians as a whole. Second, much research does not differentiate between injuries of serious versus casual equestrians. As research shows that the development of a positive relationship between horse and rider is an important factor in minimizing injury, it could be assumed that casual equestrians would make up a larger percentage of injuries than serious equestrians based on the short-term, transient nature of their relationships.

Both riding and non-riding activities with horses contain a natural element of danger. Specifically, horseback riding can be dangerous. When mounted, a rider’s head can be more than ten feet off the ground, and when moving, horses can travel up to 40 miles per hour (Silver 2002). In the United States, it is estimated that annually 30 million people ride horses, which results in 50,000 trips to the emergency room, or one trip per 600 riders (Carrillo et al. 2007). In a study of 679 equestrians in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, researchers found at some point in their riding career, one in five riders experienced a serious injury resulting in hospitalization, surgery or long term disability (Mayberry et al. 2007). The most frequent cause of death and serious injury for mounted and dismounted horse activities was head injury (Barone and Rodgers 1989; Cripps 2000; Jagodzinski and DeMuri 2005; Nelson and Bixby-Hammett 1992).

The most common physical injury experienced by participants in this study were acute and chronic injuries sustained by participants as a direct result of their horse. The

mild degree of physical cost proposed in this model of serious leisure cost included bruises, scrapes, bites, and jammed fingers or toes. The cause of injury in the majority of these cases was falling or being thrown off a horse. The majority of these injuries occurred in an arena, with the second highest incidence occurring inside a barn. The physical location of these injuries was most often on the rider's upper body, with lower body injuries occurring second most in frequency and head/neck injuries occurring least frequently. All participants in this study endured mild physical costs as hunter/jumper equestrians.

Participants identified horses' physical size and nature as a prey animal as a primary cause of physical costs in equestrianism. Natalie explained the physical danger posed by her horse:

Their size makes them much more dangerous to be with, you have to constantly aware of where your feet are, where your fingers are and what around you could possibly startle your horse and make him jump sideways on top of you at any moment.

However, participants generally accepted the risk of physical injury involved with equestrianism. Cecelia highlighted the normalcy of physical injury among horse owners'

If you're around horses often enough you will get injured.

In terms of mild physical costs, all participants described experiencing multiple types of injuries. Amy described several common mild physical injuries and the normalcy of experiencing them among horse owners:

I've had multiple concussions, countless bruises, cuts, scrapes, toes that have been stepped on. You just get used to most of it.

Somewhat less common among participants were moderate physical costs. The moderate degree of physical cost was experienced by seven out of 15 participants. These

costs included injuries such as concussions, dislocations, fractures, lacerations, broken bones and torn ligaments. All seven participants experienced their injury from falling or being thrown off their horse in a riding arena. The physical location of these injuries was most frequently the upper body (three out of seven), the head/neck (three out of seven) and least frequently the lower body (one out of seven). Six out of seven participants saw a doctor for their injury, with three that required emergency room care and two that required surgery.

In spite of the increased severity and decreased occurrence of moderate physical costs, participants did not regard them as a deterrent to participation. Instead, these moderate physical injuries were seen as more of a mild hindrance or an obstacle to continued participation. Patricia described her dislocated shoulder as a barrier preventing her from riding:

I do nothing but watch them because I dislocated my shoulder two weeks ago, riding, and it's such a pain, I have to have surgery on it next week so right now I can't ride.

Yet, despite the risks of riding with a moderate physical injury, many participants, including Patricia, disregarded medical advice and continued riding with injuries. Natalie described giving consideration to logistics, but not physical risks, of riding with a broken leg:

When I broke my leg riding Sirius and this is really sad, I went and I got the cast and we went and we were driving and I'm looking at the cast and I'm like I could probably ride with this.

As these participants highlight, the incidence of mild and moderate physical injuries were relatively common. Perhaps because of the frequency of their occurrence, mild and moderate physical injuries were seen as a nuisance, which obstructed

participants' continued involvement in equestrianism. To participants, the meaning and importance of the pursuit, to participants, was used by participants as a justification for riding with injuries. Lucy described riding with a broken collarbone because of the importance and meaning she ascribed to a particular competition:

I fell off and broke my collarbone when I was eight. But I came back and rode again the next day. I wasn't going to not ride, I mean, it was pony finals.

Using the importance of the pursuit or a specific event to justify riding with an injury was common with mild and moderate physical injuries. The severity of serious physical injuries required multiple day hospitalization, thus making it impossible for the injured participant to ride. However, participants who experienced serious injuries were more inclined to follow medical advice while the injury was serious. When serious injuries healed to the level of mild or moderate injuries, participants similarly used the importance and meaning of the pursuit to justify riding.

The serious degree of physical cost was the least common degree of physical cost endured by participants. Serious physical costs included chronic or persistent injuries and any injury requiring surgery and hospitalization for longer than twenty-four hours. One participant sustained a serious injury, and one participant's daughter suffered a serious injury, although her daughter was not a participant in this study. The cause of injury for the participant was from getting thrown off her horse, which also resulted in the participant getting kicked by her horse. The cause of injury for the participant's daughter was from being kicked by her horse while in a barn. The physical location of injury for the participant was her head/neck and for the participant's daughter was her upper body. Both required emergency transportation and hospitalization longer than twenty-four hours.



Despite the severity and rare occurrence of serious physical injuries, participants did not view theirs or others' injuries as a deterrent to participation. Jane described her serious physical injury:

Bella bucked me off and when I fell I scared her and she kicked out and hit the side of my face. I had to be in the hospital for several days after that, I had oral surgery 'cause she broke my jaw. I had to have my jaw almost wired shut for a couple months until it healed. I went to physical therapy for a while after for neck and hip problems. And I still get sore sometimes. Not to mention that 6 plus years later I still can't open my jaw all the way.

As Jane explained, her injury has had long-term consequences. Yet, despite her experience of such an injury and the risk of experiencing another, she has continued participation in equestrianism.

Although some horse-related injuries are unavoidable, research demonstrates that exercising careful judgment, use of a helmet and properly matching horse and rider pairs can greatly reduce the incidence and severity of many injuries (Hausberg et al. 2008). In contrast with primary costs, secondary costs are inadvertent and unexpected, although the mild degree was experienced universally by participants. Despite the degree of physical injury experienced, all participants continued their involvement after their injury. Symbolically, the sustainment of a physical sacrifice was a form of subcultural capital for hunter/jumper equestrians. Sarah Thornton (1995), drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'cultural capital,' suggests that a similar concept exists within a subculture, where 'subcultural capital' confers status on the owner "in the eyes of the relevant beholder" (p.10-16). Thornton (1995) further suggests that there are specific spaces where these subcultural distinctions are most salient, and in this way, subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied, and refers to the value of individuals' knowledge, attitudes, language or experiences. As markers of their involvement in the pursuit,

embodied subcultural capital helps participants produce a collective identity and reproduce feelings of solidarity. As such, participants' own bodies are used as a site of identity and as vehicles for the accumulation of subcultural capital. The physical costs endured by equestrians can be understood as forms of subcultural capital, which display participants' commitment and serve as markers for their involvement.

### *Emotional Cost*

In addition to the costs of physical injury, horse owners also experienced emotional costs. The emotional costs of relationships with horses are unique from the source of other leisure pursuit's emotional costs of other leisure pursuits such as stress, anxiety, grief, and sadness. The value participants' placed on their horses lives and the relationships they shared were the primary source of relational emotional costs. In short, horse owners' leisure pursuits are based on relationships, not objects or activities. Other leisure participants would likely experience emotional costs, but these would not come from a relationship with the subject of the pursuit, they would likely originate from the object or activity of the pursuit itself, such as the stress of kayaking through a difficult section of river or disappointment of performing poorly in a competition.

The mild degree of emotional cost proposed in this new model of serious cost was experienced by all participants and included stresses such as acute horse injury or sickness. All participants experienced mild emotional stress as a result of a one time, isolated equine injury or sickness. These injuries and sicknesses included stone bruises, non-serious cuts, abrasions or kicks, mild colic not requiring treatment by a veterinarian, and mild infections or viruses not requiring admission to a vet hospital. These injuries and sicknesses were acute, requiring less than two weeks to heal, and did not have any

long-term impact on the horses' well-being. Lucy described the emotional cost of horses' injuries in these terms:

It's emotionally upsetting when they get hurt.

As Lucy explained, horse owners described their horses' injuries as emotionally upsetting. Acute injuries or sicknesses were mild emotional costs experienced by horse owners a finite, rather than on-going, number of times.

Moderate emotional costs involved both on-going anxiety about a horses' current, or potential injury or sickness, and expected or anticipated equine death. Moderate emotional injuries and sicknesses proposed by this new model of serious leisure cost included, chronic injury or sickness, such as colic requiring treatment by a veterinarian or admission to a veterinary hospital; torn ligaments; navicular syndrome; cancer; degenerative diseases; pigeon fever; and joint injury. These injuries and sicknesses lasted longer than one month, required multiple treatments by a veterinarian, or admission to an emergency veterinary hospital. These injuries and sicknesses impacted the horse's long-term well-being and, in two cases, the horses were unable to be ridden after recovery from the acute symptoms. These sicknesses and injuries caused sustained emotional stress and worry for the participants over the course of their horses' recovery.

Participants described the uncertainty and potential severity of horses' injuries as the primary cause of emotional stress. One participant described the number of factors that can negatively affect horses' health as contributing to a "baseline level of worry:"

With the number of problems horses can have you're always sort of holding your breath that they don't colic the first hot day, or the first cold day, or with the new hay, or 'cause they didn't drink enough water, or they ate too much sand with their hay, or from a reaction to their shots or whatever. There's just so many unknown things that they can potentially get sick from you're always at some baseline level of worry.

Similarly, Eileen described the number of variables involved with a horse's health as a source of anxiety when she goes out of town:

Anytime I go out of town there's extra stress of having to find someone I trust to watch my horses. And then the constant worry if something goes wrong with them when I'm not there and I can't take care of it. There's just so many variables to account for it's hard to ever really trust anyone else 'cause it's impossible to find anyone else who treats every variable the same way you do. It's overwhelming sometimes.

As these participants described, horses' can become sick or injured from a variety of factors. Additionally, the rate at which a sick horse's condition can deteriorate is unpredictable. Cecelia described watching a sick horse's condition deteriorate quickly and the affect it had on her level of worry in future situations:

I remember when Orion had colic surgery and at the time they thought it wasn't a big deal and weren't going to take him to the hospital but then he got worse really fast and they could barely get him to stand to get him in the trailer. I honestly thought that was the last time I was going to see him. But he made it. Five days later he was back home. But watching how bad he got so fast now makes me hyper sensitive to anything that might be amiss, especially with colic.

As Cecelia explained, the progression of a horse's sickness is not always linear. A horse who seems a little restless but okay at 5 o'clock can quickly turn into a horse who is barely able to stand at 5:30.

Participants discussed many worries specifically related to colic, more than any other single sickness or injury. Emma explained this specific focus on colic:

And unfortunately they do have a lot of, are subject to a lot of illnesses, colic you know being the main one, I mean you're constantly worrying about them.

Participants' concern over colic was not unfounded. Research indicates colic is the number one cause of death in horses and affects one in ten horses annually (Tinker et al. 1997). The frequency and uncertainty of horses colicking were described by participants

as contributing to their anxiety. However, some participants identified the limited number of treatment options available for horses as a source of anxiety:

The strain of having to decide to put one down is just awful. You tell yourself you're relieving their suffering but you're killing them to do it. I mean we don't do that to people, maybe we should, but there's a much higher value on human life, and I'm not saying that's bad, but they treat humans, and even dogs and cats, they are able to live through a lot more than horses. There's a lot fewer treatment options if something goes wrong with a horse. I mean if a dog breaks his leg now-a-days most likely they'll live, if a horse breaks their leg, that's it, you're putting them down. They're so much more fragile despite their size and power. (Emma)

As Emma highlighted, because of their size, a primary cause of anxiety in horse owners is the difficulty involved with treating horses. Unlike dogs or cats, who can be kept relatively sedentary or non-weight bearing on one limb, horses with similar injuries are often euthanized due to the limitations of similar treatment.

What is essential to the emotional costs of equestrianism is their relational nature. Owners do not describe worry, anxiety, or stress about the prospect of not being able to participate in the activity of riding, but rather they expressed fear, worry, and stress about the health and potential loss of the relationship with their horse. Eileen explained this relational loss in these terms:

I think, for me, I worry, not specifically, like that they'll colic or hurt themselves, but generally, that something will cause them pain that I can't prevent or will take them out of my life permanently. I mean like that something would kill them or necessitate putting them down. Just anything like that that is out of my hands that would take them out of my life.

As Eileen described, moderate emotional costs involved horse owners' concern over the life and well-being of their horses. Many participants expressed feeling some degree of responsibility to care for their horses, as the decision to domesticate, own, and

stable a horse substantially increased their dependence on humans, as articulated by Eileen:

They're horses, they're not humans, but they are people. They're individuals, they have personalities. They're their own person. And I feel like they deserve as much, or more of my time than humans because I'm responsible for them. I made the choice to own horses, so it would be irresponsible of me to not give them the best quality of life that I can. And a lot of human-people don't get that. They think 'it's just a horse, so who cares?' But that's like saying they're not as living as we are so they don't deserve to be treated like living beings. So humans who don't understand that horses are people too don't stay in my life very long.

Many participants constructed a "personlike" identity for their horses, as discussed by Eileen (and in Chapter 4), and often viewed them as family members or close friends. As with the loss of other important "persons," participants who experienced the death of a horse expressed profound feelings of grief, loss, and sorrow, which lasted for years.

Serious emotional cost was experienced by four participants, which constituted the largest category of serious secondary cost. These four participants all experienced the unanticipated death of a horse. One of the deaths resulted from injury and three resulted from colic. Three of the horses who died were owned by participants who were not first time horse owners and at the time owned other horses. All three participants continued owning horses without interruption after they experienced the death of their horse. One participant was a first time horse owner and did not own other horses at the time of her horse's death. This participant did not immediately return to horse ownership and stopped riding entirely for several weeks after her horse's death. After several months of riding other horses, this participant acquired another horse and returned to horse ownership. Molly described the profound grief and sadness she felt years after the death of her horse:

I just can't really talk about [Viktor] 'cause I feel like I fought and fought for that horse's life and you just, I just don't understand. Because of all the stuff I went through with him, I don't know, that was hard for me. It still is, I mean five years later here I am crying about it, I guess that shows you he really meant something to me.

Similarly, Lee discussed the guilt and loss she experienced after having to euthanize her horse:

And I killed the one that loved me the most, so I'm not nearly as attached to them as I used to be. This would have been an interesting question to have asked me several years ago when I had my mare Avery, who absolutely loved me. But I denerved her front feet because she had a navicular and she was one of the rare, rare cases where instead of making their feet less sensitive they made them more sensitive. So she was then lame at the walk, like couldn't go around a corner lame. So I had to put her down. And I haven't been as attached to any of them since then.

Unlike other types of cost (monetary, time, and physical injury), the emotional costs of equestrianism were largely invisible to those outside the pursuit. The relationships constructed between participants and their horses were paradoxically both the cause of emotional costs and the motivation to continue participation. These participants were only willing to give up their money, time, physical safety, and emotional well-being in the context of equestrianism because of the meaning and value they ascribed to their relationships and interactions with horses. As Emma explained, the costs of equestrianism were only worth sacrificing because of the relationships they shared with horses:

I think all the pain and worry and injuries that we all go through are worth it because of the horses. We wouldn't sacrifice like this to be race car drivers. It's only worth it because the horses give back to you. You get out as much, probably more, than you put in.

### *Social Cost*

Unlike small animals such as dogs who are seen as social catalysts between strangers, horse ownership takes place largely in a contained setting outside 'normal' interactions with strangers. While horses often serve as a social catalyst between horse owners, participation in horse activities largely isolates participants from interaction with those outside the horse world. Cecelia described this isolation in terms of annoying non-horse friends:

We annoy all of our non-horse owner friends 'cause we tend to talk about nothing but horses.

This isolation can be both positive, in the sense that it helps foster 'we-feelings' and binds members together, but it can be negative as well, by reducing new non-horse friendships and taking time away from non-horse activities, people, and relationships.

Natalie described the positive effects of equestrianism's isolation in terms of promoting camaraderie between participants, and the negative effects of reducing understanding and time spent with non-owners:

Other friends don't, they just look at you. Even Dean, my husband, I'll go home and try to tell him something about Sirius and he just glazes over, and I'm like 'were you listening?' and he's just like 'I don't know what you're talking about.' (laughs). So it's nice having people who know what you're talking about, and care (laughs) yeah and care. And don't just look at you like you're insane, 'why do you do this again?' 'Why do you keep taking lessons? Haven't you learned it yet? Why do you pay money to do this?' Dean asked me once years ago when I was riding with Susan and we were going through a bad winter and he said 'why do you pay somebody to yell at you?' And I'm like 'I'm paying somebody to make me better' (laughs). But people just don't understand it.

For many participants, equestrianism is a central component of their identity; something they proudly advertise and wear on their sleeve, making it hard to be surprised by the amount of time they spend with their horse. Patricia explained the centrality of



horses in her life as superseding other identity-roles, such as mother, and her attempts to integrate other, subordinate identity-roles in her life into her master identity-role as a horse owner:

It's my entire identity at this point. It's all about the horses, which makes me feel guilty because I have a human child (laughs) and I can't identify at all with the other mothers, I just, I can't. I think it's very important in my life right now. It defines me. I mean people say what do you do and I'm like I ride, I own horses and, oh yes, this is my son.

However, many owners experienced strain and even loss of friendships with co-workers, friends, family, and even spouses who could not (or would not) accept the owner's master identity-role as a horse owner. Molly highlighted the social costs of her horse ownership:

I've lost friends, the horses caused a lot of fights with my ex-husband 'cause he didn't like how much time I spent with them.

Although most participants described expanding their social contacts as horse owners, the relationships that were created and strengthened were exclusively with other horse owners. Cecelia described horses as "expanding your life," but within the boundaries of the horse world:

Horses, you know, they're so needy that they expand your life a lot, you know, you have to take care of them...and it always takes more than one person. So if you travel, you need horse people to look after your horse. If your riding isn't going as well as you'd like it to then you need other horse people, or a trainer to help you. They really expand your life and introduce you to a lot of new horse people.

All participants experienced some level of strain or loss in their relationships with non-horse owners. Sara described the stress on relationships with non-owners caused by horse owners' commitments in these terms:

There's certain things like, oh, relationships that kind of suffer from time to time when they don't understand or whatever the time commitment.

Similarly, Emma described her time commitment to horses as causing strain in her relationships with co-workers:

Everybody where I work just cannot fathom getting up at 5 in the morning and cleaning stalls in the morning before leaving for work at 7, no matter what the temperature is. They just don't understand it, being that devoted to something. And all they do is complain about being tired. And why? All they do is sit on their rear-ends and read trashy novels and watch T.V. It does create some strain between us at work, I guess you could say that, but we're just different kinds of people.

As Emma explained, a major cause of social costs was conflict with non-owners about participants' commitment to equestrianism. Similarly, moderate social cost involved stress or strain with family members or best-friends and loss of non-best friends and intimate partners. Alice described differing with her boyfriend over the perceived valuation of her horse's injury as causing strain in their relationship:

Other people when you talk about your horse stuff, they're like what. Like Warrington [interviewee's boyfriend], I told Warrington about it and he was like um, I'm sorry, I don't know what to say.

Moderate social costs of equestrianism were experienced by seven participants.

Jane explained the strain keeping her horse at home would place on her marriage:

He's boarded to help keep my husband happy, he would not like the feeding schedule of having a horse at home.

As Jane explained, social costs can be seen as two types: manifest, which were readily understood by both parties as open conflict; and internal, which were perceived only by one party as having the potential for conflict. In the description above, Jane described an internal cost: potential conflict with her husband. To avoid this cost, Jane acted by boarding her horse, rather than keep him at home. Most costs, however, were manifest, open conflicts or strains in relationships.

The serious degree of social cost involved the loss of a primary relationship with a long-term partner or spouse. This degree of social cost was always manifest, readily understood by both parties as open conflict. Two participants experienced serious social cost that involved a severed relationship with a serious partner or spouse. Sara discussed the loss of her two year relationship:

My boyfriend of two years and I actually just broke up because he couldn't understand my prioritizing horses over him.

Similarly, Molly described her separation from her spouse as a social cost of equestrianism:

Some people just resent the time that I spend with the horses. They just don't understand it, and I don't know maybe they're jealous that the time I spend doing it isn't spent on them.

The serious social costs of equestrianism involved relationships that existed for between two and 15 years at the time participants experienced their loss. Both participants were involved with horses for at least eighty-four percent of their lives at the time their primary relationships were severed. Both participants continued owning horses after the loss of their relationship, and both described their horse as “more loyal than other people in my life.” Neither of the participants described the loss of more than one primary relationship. Participants identified their “lack of time for non-horse related activities and relationships” and “the perception that they put a higher importance on their horse than on the other person in the relationship” as the primary causes for their social sacrifice.

As the quotes of these participants highlight, horse owners experienced negative consequences from equestrianism that were serious, significant, and meaningful. The social costs described by participants were both manifest and internal, but both affected

participants' lives in detrimental ways. Manifest social costs often resulted in strained and even severed relationships at all levels, from acquaintances to spouses. Internal social costs were less visible and often measured by actions not taken or those taken to avoid conflict. Yet, despite experiencing a number of social costs, no participant regarded them as substantial enough to terminate participation. Indeed, none of the three types of secondary cost were cessative to any participants' involvement in equestrianism.

There is little research exploring the dark side of serious leisure pursuits. Stebbins' (2007) model of cost is insufficient to fully explain participants' involvement and experience in serious equestrianism because it captures only some of the costs. For a complete understanding of serious leisure pursuits, it is necessary to recognize the factors that constrain and hamper leisure involvement, as well as those that facilitate it. From the descriptions of the horse owners in this project I proposed a new model of serious leisure cost, which identified two categories of cost that constrain leisure involvement: primary and secondary costs. Primary costs include two types: monetary and time costs, which are required by participation and mostly deliberate and intentional. Secondary costs consist of three types: physical, emotional, and social, which are not required by participation and are fundamentally unexpected and inadvertent. The endurance of these costs created forms of subcultural capital that contributed to the group's cohesion and displayed participants' commitment to the pursuit. As an essential component of the unique ethos of the pursuit, costs were not merely a negative constraint but also a means through which participants maintain and affirm their commitment using the logic and values of the pursuit.

A significant element of developing the social world of hunter/jumper equestrianism involves establishing and maintaining a unique ethos. The commitment and involvement dedicated by participants led to some isolation from the non-horse world and in their immersion in the social world of horses. Participants' unique experiences, emotions, and relationships each created forms of subcultural capital in the pursuit. The accumulation of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) within the pursuit tended to lead to more isolation from the non-horse world. Some of these participants expressed the belief that those outside the pursuit could never understand the meaning or scope of the pursuit. It is unclear from this research whether a subcultural capital threshold exists, which once exceeded creates a sort of self-perpetuating cycle of isolation from non-leisure worlds and ever-greater leisure involvement and commitment. The findings of this research do suggest, however, that despite its many benefits, serious leisure pursuits are not without serious costs.

A central component of equestrianism is the emotional and reciprocal relationship constructed between humans and horses. Unlike other serious leisure pursuits, equestrianism involves two "peoplelike" agents of different species. Equestrianism generated several relational, rather than leisure-based costs. Relational costs would likely not be found in other serious leisure pursuits not involving partnerships, but would likely be associated with a number of human-animal activities, such as dog sports. Despite seeming to add to the number and degree of costs experienced by participants, the relational nature of equestrianism justified even the most serious sacrifices because of the meaning constructed by participants through interaction with their horse partners. Thus, it was because of participants' relationships with their horses that participants were willing

to endure (seemingly any) costs of equestrianism. The testimony of these horse owners provide evidence that the costs of serious leisure are substantial and meaningful, and warrant the creation of a new model that reflects the seriousness that characterizes participants' approach and sacrifices within a pursuit.

## CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION

Human-horse activities have, up until now, not been considered as a form of serious leisure. Furthermore, currently research does not exist that examines any human-animal activities as a type of amateur pursuit, rather than hobbyist activity. This exclusion is based in part on the presumption that lacking the capacity for speaking words, animals also lack the capacities for mind, self, meaning construction, and authentic interaction. As with others (Alger and Alger 1997; Brandt 2005; Irvine 2004; Sanders 1993), this research challenged this view and presented evidence that in addition to dogs and cats, horses are also capable of constructing meaning and achieving intersubjectivity with their human partners. Additionally, this research attempted to bridge the gap between the literature on serious literature and human-animal studies by highlighting a rich area for future inquiry: serious human-animal activities. The prospect of the investigation of bridging serious leisure and human-animal studies offers a route to expanding the current sociological conception of the mind and the self beyond a linguicentric determination, as well as expanding the boundary of “personhood,” and the broadening our understanding of the interactional construction of identity. The ultimate utility of such investigations is the opportunity they create:

To reconstruct the world of nature...rather than a world separated into subjects (scientists, men, the powerful) and objects (women, animals, ‘savages’)...the image of the world that is offered is one composed of subjects-in-interaction, human and nonhuman actors cooperating and struggling with the historical, political, cultural forces in which their activities are embedded. (Arluke and Sanders 1993:386)

Exploring serious leisure within the context of hunter/jumper equestrianism highlighted the distinction between amateur pursuits and hobbyist activities; emphasized the importance of interaction in the construction of the mind, the self, and for the possibility of achieving intersubjectivity; examined the definitional social-psychological characteristics of serious leisure; and proposed a new model for analyzing the costs of serious leisure pursuits. In doing so, I emphasized the lived experiences of the horse owners in this study through the participants' rich, detailed descriptions to challenge the detached and disconnected presumptions that reduce horses to mindless, emotionless automatons. Specifically, this thesis identified serious hunter/jumper equestrianism to be an important source of identity, culture, and social interaction for participants. However, involvement in hunter/jumper equestrianism was not without negative consequences. Rather, participants experienced five types of cost, which could be characterized as serious, significant, and meaningful; not unlike the manner that characterized their approach to their pursuit.

## **INTERSUBJECTIVITY**

Horses' instrumental capacity to be ridden, combined with their subjectivity, differentiates equestrianism from other human-animal activities and other object- or activity oriented leisure activities. As such, equestrianism provides a unique context to explore characteristics of serious leisure, human-animal intersubjectivity, and the costs of participating in a pursuit that is on the margins of both. As a serious leisure pursuit, equestrianism has been classified as a hobbyist pursuit (Stebbins 2007). However, using Stebbins' (2007) own criteria, equestrianism clearly contains a group of professionals,



whose enactment of the venerated core activity is both visible and influential to amateurs in the pursuit. According to Stebbins' (2007) criteria, the presence of this group of professionals alone is sufficient to warrant classification as an amateur pursuit.

This research went further by dismantling two other features by which Stebbins (2007) classifies it as a hobbyist pursuit: that riders are 'beating' the object of challenge and that a horse is akin to other types of 'nature.' The testimony of the horse owners in this thesis supported the view of the mind and the self as socially constructed and as not predicated by spoken language. Furthermore, what has emerged from the testimony of the participants in this study is a view of horses as minded actors, who, through interaction with humans, communicate their subjectivity through action. Thus, it is through interaction that intersubjectivity is accomplished. Research examining human-animal activities offers to extend the interactional perspective on how the mind, identity, and personhood are constructed beyond the confines of spoken language. I contend that human-animal activities do not exist in a language vacuum, but rather the participants in interaction construct a new language using the alphabet of action, rather than spoken words, to communicate meaning.

### **SERIOUS LEISURE- SIX DEFINITIONAL ELEMENTS**

Using Stebbins' (2007) framework, evidence was also presented considering equestrianism's consistency with the social-psychological characteristics of serious leisure. These characteristics include perseverance, leisure career, significant personal effort, durable benefits, unique ethos, and strong personal identification with the pursuit.

### *Perseverance*

The first characteristic of serious leisure evident in equestrianism is the occasional need to persevere or overcome adversity. Human-animal studies often focus on the use of animals in therapeutic settings as tools for affecting humans' physiological and psychological limitations. Furthermore, participants' experiences in facing adversity served as 'badges of honor' or forms of subcultural capital, which enhanced or affirmed equestrians' status in their horse world. The separateness of participants' social world also necessitated perseverance through competing demands of the 'real world' and 'horse world.' 'Real world' commitments presented challenges to participants' serious leisure commitment, primarily in their financial and time allocation. Perseverance through adversity, as well as from competing demands of various social worlds provided participants with sources of subcultural capital, in the form of experience and stories, long after the event's occurrence. In this way, adversity was not solely something negative to overcome but also something of value to participants. Indeed, many participants described their own physical injuries with pride and used them to demonstrate their commitment to the social world of horses. Thus, perseverance generally involved the negotiation of constraints: based on danger, risk, anxiety and injury, as well as the competing demands of 'real world' institutions, such as family, work, school, etc.

### *Leisure Career*

The second feature of serious leisure evident in hunter/jumper equestrians is the development of a leisure career in the pursuit. Two types of career trajectories were

found: childhood-entrants and adult-entrants. Of the two types, childhood-entrants were more common. Additionally, one commonality expressed unanimously was participants' life-long love of horses. As a central life interest, participants' leisure career commenced, typically through riding lessons, or less commonly, through time spent with family owned horses. Serious careers were demarcated at the point when participants' first horse was purchased. Buying, but more importantly, owning a horse was a significant marker, indicating participants' serious commitment to the pursuit.

For some, careers were also marked by participation in horse shows, typically beginning with small, local events and eventually progressing to large, national events. Participation in horse shows was also a source of subcultural capital, which raised participants' level of identification and credibility with other owners. The collection of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) was, in turn, an important motivator for participants to affirm a valued social identity. Combined with the common practice of storytelling, participants 'collected places' (Urry 2002), which were then used to affirm and portray a certain social identity, as well as substantiate their reputation. The combination of owning horses, working with them and competing with them indicated the multiple dimensions of participants' careers.

### *Significant Personal Effort*

The third characteristic evident from this study is the requirement for significant personal effort. Leisure research typically examines participants' subjective understanding of their use of free time. Since hunter/jumper equestrians can be viewed as a unique use of free time, it was important to examine how participants viewed their

involvement. Significant personal effort was expended by participants in physical effort and in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience. One of the values described by participants was independence or self-sufficiency. Significant efforts were made to gain the knowledge, skills and experience to ride, care for and compete with horses without reliance on other people. Participants also expressed pride in their abilities not to rely on their horses to 'take care of them' or 'babysit them' and made considerable effort to improve their skills as riders. The effort expended by participants seemed to be in a reciprocal relationship with providing a valued identity, whereby the activity needed to require a significant personal effort to provide a valued identity and by obtaining a valued identity, participants continued to make significant efforts to maintain it.

#### *Durable Benefits*

The presence of durable benefits or outcomes is the fourth social-psychological characteristic of serious leisure evident in hunter/jumper equestrians. Human-animal studies research often examines the benefits to humans of interacting with animals. Participants described five key benefits accrued because of their serious leisure pursuit: self-actualization, self-enrichment, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image and social interaction. These benefits were the reason for continuing participation, the source of motivation and satisfaction. Benefits were accrued in relation to participants' identity narrative and served to affirm and enhance their relationship with their horse.

A key outcome of participation was the opportunity it provided as a site for collective identity, or 'we-feelings' (Dunning 1999). As amateurs, equestrians exist in the

margins, not quite dabblers but not entirely professionals. Institutionally, serious leisure lacks support for amateurs and hobbyists intense level of participation. The role ambiguity that results manifests itself in the tensions, constraints, and negotiations participants faced in maintaining their commitment. In the social world of horses, participants shared a common bond with other horse owners, a sense of community rarely experienced in the non-horse world. In this sense, participants descriptions suggest that the social world of horses is a type of third place, outside the home and work environment, where they find meaning. Stebbins' (1999) speculated about the ways social worlds formed around serious leisure are linked to wider society. Indeed, participants formed bonds with not only their immediate social networks, but also nationally and even internationally with other equestrians. This research suggests that leisure can provide an opportunity for individuals to assert their leisure identity and provide a sense of community and meaning with others in that social world.

### *Unique Ethos*

The fifth serious leisure characteristic evident in hunter/jumper equestrians is the unique subculture or ethos that emerges from pursuit. The ethos of hunter/jumper equestrians can be described by a set of attitudes, practices, beliefs, and values. Storytelling was often used to substantiate particular ideas and claims. One particular type of storytelling used frequently was good versus bad owner comparisons, referred to in the literature as the above average effect or illusory superiority (Hoorens 1993). Two possible explanations for this practice were discussed by Alicke and Gororun (2005): focalism and the self versus aggregate comparison bias. Focalism explains the better than

average effect to be the result of individuals placing greater significance on their own ability or characteristic than that of the target comparison. The self versus aggregate comparison bias suggests that when making comparisons there is a general tendency to evaluate any single person or object, not just himself or herself, as better than the average. Although not widely discussed in leisure or human-animal studies literature, illusory superiority is a common phenomena discussed in social psychology literature and suggests a possible topic for further inquiry.

The ethos of serious horse ownership is further manifest in a second form of storytelling: ‘if only’ stories are used in creating and recreating identity narratives. Retelling and ‘if only’ stories allow individuals to categorize themselves through meaningful characteristics of the group, and subsequently, through association with such characteristics, to be part of the ‘in-group.’ The practice of using comparisons and ‘if only’ stories provides individuals with a sense of belonging, a means to connect to others and the opportunity to use valued identities to enhance their self-worth and self-esteem (Shipway and Jones 2008).

Hunter/jumper equestrians also placed a high value on self-reliance and independence. Participants often used their independence to validate the many sacrifices they endured in the pursuit. In this sense, participants expressed the belief that their horses were more reliable than most people in their lives; a belief reinforced by the all-consuming nature of the activity. Participants also held the belief that horses are individuals, each with their own subjective presence and personality, and experiences with different horses strengthened this belief. The identity of hunter/jumper equestrians is not immediately identifiable, unlike identities such as race or gender, and the use of

signifiers such as dress or language can be seen as the consequence of the desire to portray a certain social identity and to conform to the group's prototype (Shipway and Jones 2008).

### *Identification*

Strong identification with the pursuit is the last social-psychological characteristic of serious leisure evident in hunter/jumper equestrians. All participants identified themselves as equestrians. As Kivel and Kleiber (2000) noted, the leisure context influences the salience of a particular identity. Indeed, situational clues and the context setting influenced the display of prescribed elements of behavior (Shipway and Jones 2008). Identification was demonstrated through dress, home decoration, vehicle choice, and type of residence. As a central life interest, horses formed a key component of the lifestyle of a 'horse-lady.' Identification with the term 'horse-lady' or 'horse-person' was used both self-referentially and by others to describe participants' lifestyle. For most, their leisure identity was an integral component of their sense of self, including an evaluation of values, priorities, and personal identification.

### **SERIOUS LEISURE COSTS**

In addition to the social-psychological and structural characteristics of hunter/jumper equestrians, this research also offered insight into the costs associated with this pursuit. Because the costs of serious leisure activities are specific to each pursuit, there is little in the way of a cost-framework established by existing literature. In this

way, this research added to our understanding of serious leisure activities by expanding our knowledge on some of the negative elements of serious leisure.

Five dimensions of cost were identified in hunter/jumper equestrians: time, financial, physical, emotional and social. Of these five, the first two, time and financial cost, can be defined as anticipated and essential. The last three, physical, emotional and social cost, can be defined as unanticipated and nonessential, meaning that sacrifices in these three dimensions were not a prerequisite to the pursuit, but rather an unanticipated consequence. Although mild cost across the five dimensions was described unanimously, these, as well as the more variable moderate and severe sacrifices, were contextualized by participants as part of the lifestyle and justified using the social world ethos. The unique dimension of emotional attachment to their horse, another living creature, made it difficult for participants to limit the amount of resources expended on their horses. Personal identification as a 'horse-person,' and the belief that the horses reflected who they are, their values and lifestyle further justified many sacrifices for their horses and the pursuit. Thus, although costs were identified as negative aspects of the pursuit, they were situated far below the value of the lifestyle and participants' strong identification with the pursuit.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

As the results of this thesis demonstrated, researching hunter/jumper equestrianism broadens our understanding of important concepts in leisure studies. Specifically, this thesis explored three elements: structural elements, social-psychological characteristics, and costs of serious hunter/jumper equestrianism. Horse ownership,



specifically hunter/jumper equestrianism, is an example of a free time leisure activity, which emphasized human-animal relationships and provided valued social identities. By considering hunter/jumper equestrianism as a leisure pursuit, we gain insight into the dynamic relationship between humans and animals, as well as leisure's potential capacity as a source for identity, community, and sacrifice. These results demonstrate the complexities in defining amateur pursuits and hobbyist activities, the importance of, and the manner in, which leisure can affect both identity and community. Additionally, this thesis demonstrates how human-animal relationships and leisure studies can be linked, expanding our understanding of both topics in a manner not previously explored.

Human-animal studies research stress the importance of relationships and subjectivity in explaining how humans and animals develop deep emotional bonds based on intimacy and mutual exploration over time. Relationships, as opposed to interactions, are important, because they imply two conscious agents in control of their actions that shape the unique biography of the relationship. As such, the relationships that these equestrians developed with their horses influenced all areas and dynamics of their lives. By broadening our understanding of subjectivity, we must also address the concepts of agency and meaningful interaction beyond merely verbal language. By analyzing these complexities and broadening our understanding of subjectivity, agency and interaction sociologists can gain insight into human-animal relationships. Future attempts to analyze and define benefits of companion animals must acknowledge the importance of relationships, especially in terms of involvement and species variation, in conferring benefits.

Leisure studies stress the importance of free time as a source of meaning, outside traditional sources of work, religion, and family. As a theoretical framework, serious leisure is characterized by an approach that is earnest, intense, passionate; thus, serious. Companion animals, and humans' relationship with them, increasingly provide a source of meaning and serious use of free time. Incorporating equestrianism as a form of serious leisure expands the boundary of leisure. By broadening our understanding of serious leisure pursuits, we must also address its capacity to provide a valued source of identity and community. Recognizing these capacities and expanding the boundary of leisure, sociologists can gain insight into new sources of community and identity, in an increasingly fragmented post-modern world (Simmel 1955; Dunning 1999). Existing leisure research shows that taking part in 'high investment' activities (Kelly 1987) is linked to higher life satisfaction in older adults (Dupuis and Sinale 1995; Kaplan, 1979; Riddick and Daniel 1984).

This thesis explored the role emotional ties to animals played in fostering leisure involvement. One dynamic evident in this research is the importance of examining leisure pursuits as sources of identity, community, and sacrifice. These elements have implications for further sociological research. By examining human-animal relationships, we can gain insight into important symbolic interaction concepts such as agency and semiotics. By examining the connection between social relationships and leisure settings, we can gain insight into community dynamics. By examining the costs of serious leisure pursuits, we can gain understanding of cultures of commitment and personal interpretations of marginality and boundaries.

## LIMITATIONS

This research is unique in its attempt to explore hunter/jumper equestrianism as a serious leisure activity: an amateur pursuit. However, it is limited in the scope and research design. Research has examined the therapeutic benefits of animals as tools for improving the well-being of humans, but has not addressed pets as a form of leisure or as a source of social identity and community. It is important to point out that serious equestrianism as categorized in this research described a mode of engaging with horses, specifically by the seriousness with which participants approach their pursuit. People who are involved with horses in a more casual mode would likely not derive the meaning, career, or durable benefits offered by serious involvement. Since this research used in-depth interviews and observation to describe serious leisure in the context of equestrianism, it is also limited in scope. This research is also limited by its sample's narrow racial and gender composition, as well as the geographic scope. Participants clearly addressed unique and interesting aspects of human-animal relationships and leisure, but further research exploring these areas is needed to strengthen the external validity of these results.

Despite limitations of this study, it provided a new perspective on leisure and human-animal relationships. Because these two topics have not been previously connected, this research attempted to illustrate the insights gained from exploring equestrianism as a form of serious leisure. This project has described the social-psychological and structural characteristics of serious leisure evidenced by hunter/jumper equestrians. This thesis also explored equestrianism as an amateur pursuit, rather than hobbyist pursuit and highlighted sacrifices unique to this pursuit. Finally, through the use

of detailed personal narratives, this research allows the rich, vivid voices of the equestrians in the project to support the unique analysis and contribution presented in this thesis.

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## APPENDIX A

The following outline of topics summarizes the substance and format of questions to be used in the interview.

1. Horse Information/Description
  - a. How many horses do you own (personally)?
  - b. Could you briefly describe each of your horses?
  - c. How long have you owned horses in general?
  - d. When did you learn to ride horses?
  - e. What do you do with each of your horse(s)? /what their jobs?
  - f. Where do you keep your horses?
  - g. How often do you ride or work with horses?
  - h. What do you see as the positive benefits to you owning horses?
  - i. What (if any) are the negative aspects of owning horses?
2. Attachment
  - a. I want you to think of actually being with your horse. What type of connection do you feel to your horse, or to horses in general?
  - b. Can you describe your ideal horse? How is (are) your horse(s) similar or different from this ideal?
  - c. How typical do you think your connection to your horse is?
3. Interaction
  - a. In general how often do you associate with other horse owners?
  - b. In what ways do you associate with other horse owners?
  - c. Can you describe the type of relationship you have with other horse owners?
  - d. In what ways (if any) do you feel connected to other horse owners?
  - e. Do you feel that you have a certain identity because you own horses? Please describe.
4. Scale Questions

For the following questions subjects' will be asked to rank their answer of a scale of 1-5, with 1 representing an answer of strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neither agree nor disagree, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree.

  - a. I feel closer to my horse than to many of my friends
  - b. I like my horse because she/he accepts me no mater what I do.
  - c. My horse makes me feel loved.
  - d. My horse gives me something to talk about with others.
  - e. I feel closer to my horse than to other family members.
  - f. My horse keeps me from being lonely.
  - g. I like my horse because she/he is more loyal than other people in my life.
  - h. My hose gives me something to take care of.

- i. There are times when my horse is my closest companion.
- 5. Demographics
  - a. Length of Residence
    - i. Less than one year; 1 to 4 years; 5 to 9 years; 10 to 19 years; 20 to 39 years; 40+ years
  - b. Age
    - i. 18-29; 30-49; 50-69; 70+
  - c. Gender
    - i. Female; Male
  - d. Length of Education
    - i. 11 years or less; 12; 13-15; 16 or more
  - e. Marital status
    - i. Married; divorced; widow (er); separated; living with partner; single
  - f. Family income
    - i. Less than \$8000; \$8-15,000; \$15,001-30,000; \$30,001-\$45,000; \$45,001-\$60,000; \$60,001-\$100,000; \$100,000+
  - g. Property ownership
    - i. Own home with horses kept at home; own home with horses not kept at home; rent home with horses kept at home; rent home with horses not kept at home
  - h. How much time do you spend with horses each week?
    - i. Less than 1 hour; 1-3 hours; 4-6 hours; 7-10 hours; 10-14 hours; 14-20 hours; 20-40 hours; 40+ hours
  - i. How much time do you spend with other people when you are around horses each week?
    - i. Less than 1 hour; 1-3 hours; 4-6 hours; 7-10 hours; 10-14 hours; 14-20 hours; 20-40 hours; 40+ hours
- 6. Other/Comments